

Draft Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland



Northern Ireland
Executive

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1. Foreword

It is no exaggeration to say that never before have we faced such environmental challenges as those which confront us today. On a global scale our world is under unprecedented pressure from population growth, the impact of fossil fuels and unsustainable living. The impacts of climate change such as rising sea levels, droughts and wildfires pose a real risk to our communities and livelihoods across the world. Locally, our environment is under threat from pollution in its many forms.



Action is required if we are to realistically respond to the challenges of climate change, the destruction of habitats, the loss of biodiversity and the impacts of pollution on land and at sea, including plastic pollution. Meeting and dealing with these challenges is something that can only be achieved through global cooperation in tandem with local, grass roots initiatives. We all have a responsibility in meeting these challenges and it is incumbent on all of us to protect and preserve our local environment as we strive to protect and preserve our planet for future generations. Against this background it is my privilege to launch the Northern Ireland Executive's Environment Strategy. Building on the public discussion exercise undertaken by my Department in 2019/20 (Annex A), this Strategy sets out a vision for the future of Northern Ireland's environment and the Executive's role in dealing with the challenges we face.

Our environment affects every aspect of our existence. It is central to all life, what we do, what we eat, how we work, where we live and play, it is unquestionably our most precious asset. This Strategy sets out our plans for protecting our local environment by making sustainable living central to every aspect of our lives in the coming decades.

In the last decade we have made some notable advances in tackling local environmental issues - perhaps foremost in the public's mind would be the successful introduction of the carrier bag levy and the remarkable rise in our household recycling rates to over 50% in 2019/20. On behalf of the Executive, DAERA is leading in developing the over-arching, multi-decade Green Growth Strategy, the aim of which is to transform our society by protecting and enhancing the environment, transitioning to a more sustainable economy which is fair and just and making our contribution to UK 'net zero' greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The Environment Strategy will be a key pillar in the delivery of Green Growth.

This Strategy sets out six Strategic Environmental Outcomes (SEOs) which encompass all of the main environmental challenges we will face in the coming decades. These SEOs will form the basis of how Northern Ireland faces up to the challenges of improving our environment and our ability to connect with, understand and enjoy that environment in a responsible way. They provide us with a framework to foster environmental awareness and engagement through education and to live in harmony with our environment that provides us with a home, a livelihood



and somewhere to relax. In short, this Strategy is a guide to how we can preserve, protect and improve our environment for our children and our grandchildren.

The Strategy is an open-ended, living document that will be supported by a series of action plans and targets and it confirms our environmental priorities for the coming decades. There will be costs associated with many of the proposed actions to achieve the required outcomes which will require adequate funding through a variety of mechanisms. I and my Executive colleagues will work to ensure that Northern Ireland has the necessary resources to tackle the significant environmental challenges we face.

It is envisaged that this Strategy will be adopted as Northern Ireland's first '*Environmental Improvement Plan*' which, subject to the approval of the NI Assembly, will be a statutory requirement under the future UK Environment Act, setting the Strategy in a legal context and putting in place a statutory requirement to monitor environmental progress against the Strategy on an annual basis. Recognising this, sections 3 and 4 of this plan provide a more specific focus on natural environment issues

As we emerge into the post-Covid19 world, outside of the European Union, more than ever we need to be prepared to face the environmental challenges of today and those of tomorrow. Every one of us collectively and individually, has an important role in how we manage, preserve and protect our local environment. If we all play our part and are ambitious with our plans we can make a thriving, sustainable environment a reality here and demonstrate leadership on this crucial issue.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Edwin Poots', is located below the main text block.

Edwin Poots MLA

Issued on behalf of the Executive



2. Strategic Context

Northern Ireland faces a range of local environmental challenges including habitat and species loss, greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, waste management, the development of a circular economy, soil quality, air quality, waste crime, etc. In addition, the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union provides new environmental opportunities and, as environmental degradation poses an increasing challenge to all parts of our globe, there is a clear impetus for the first long-term, over-arching Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland's first Environment Strategy will form the basis for a coherent and effective set of interventions that can deliver real improvements in the quality of the environment and thereby: improve the health and well-being of all who live and work here; create opportunities to develop our economy; elevate Northern Ireland to an environmental leader; and enable us to play our part in protecting the global environment for many decades to come.

Part of the strategy identifies what we have achieved, where we are now, and what strategic initiatives are already in place and how these can be enhanced through new approaches to the issues we face going forward.

The new Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes will provide the strategic backdrop and drivers for the huge range of activities undertaken by Northern Ireland departments. The Environment Strategy seeks to build on the valuable work that has been, and continues to be, done across a wide range of relevant policy areas, taking as its starting point the commitment contained within the draft PfG Outcome (as consulted upon in 2021): "We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment."

DAERA has been working with stakeholders and across Northern Ireland Executive departments to develop strategic outcomes to support the premise that a better environment can provide great economic, social and health benefits for individuals and for society, and outline a pathway to realising these benefits. Underpinning this ongoing work is DAERA's Science Strategy Framework, which guides and directs how DAERA utilises science in delivering services and optimises the value DAERA achieves from science, delivering positive impacts for our environment.

The Environment Strategy forms part of the Executive's wider Green Growth agenda and, for the most part, is intended to be a high-level, Executive-endorsed strategy that will sit alongside both new and existing strategies. Figure 1 outlines major Executive and departmental strategies, relevant departmental strategies and programmes with environmental elements/interfaces, action plans and some of the key linkages between these.

For a high-level Environment Strategy to be meaningful it is essential that it is ambitious in terms of its breadth and depth. The Strategy aims to focus on ambitious outcomes for the big environmental issues facing us that will make a difference to the lives and well-being of current and future generations.



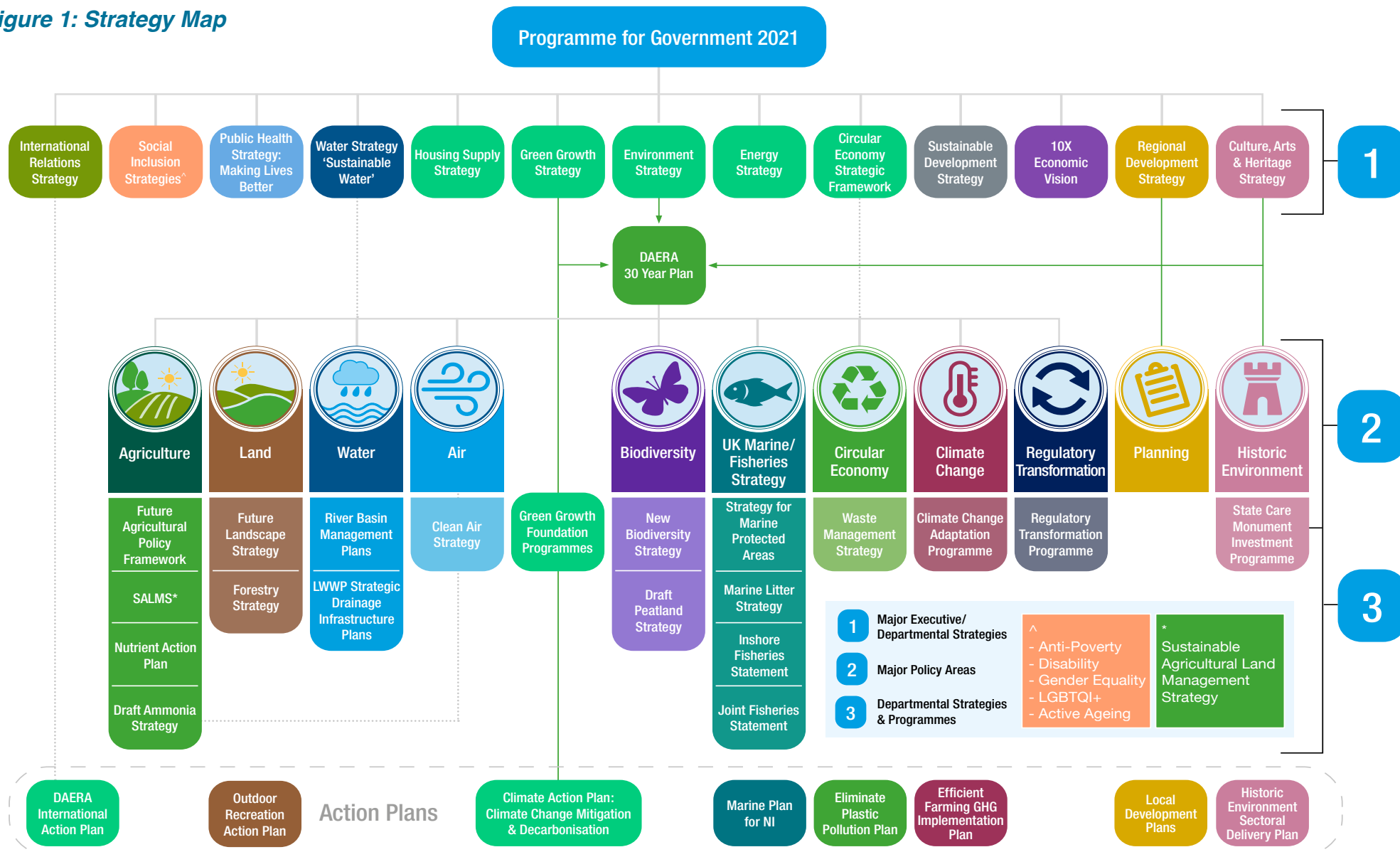
Enhancing our environment matters, as a healthy environment is interlinked with our health and well-being. What we do and how we do it impacts on the lives and needs of our current and future generations. Long term planning is essential to influence and deliver the necessary protection and enhancement of our natural and cultural capital and to ensure its long term future for those generations who will inherit it from us.

The following sub-sections provide some further detail on the key strategic drivers underpinning the Environment Strategy.





Figure 1: Strategy Map



Line 1 is not an exhaustive list of strategies and it in no way represents any form of hierarchical structure.



A. Sustainability

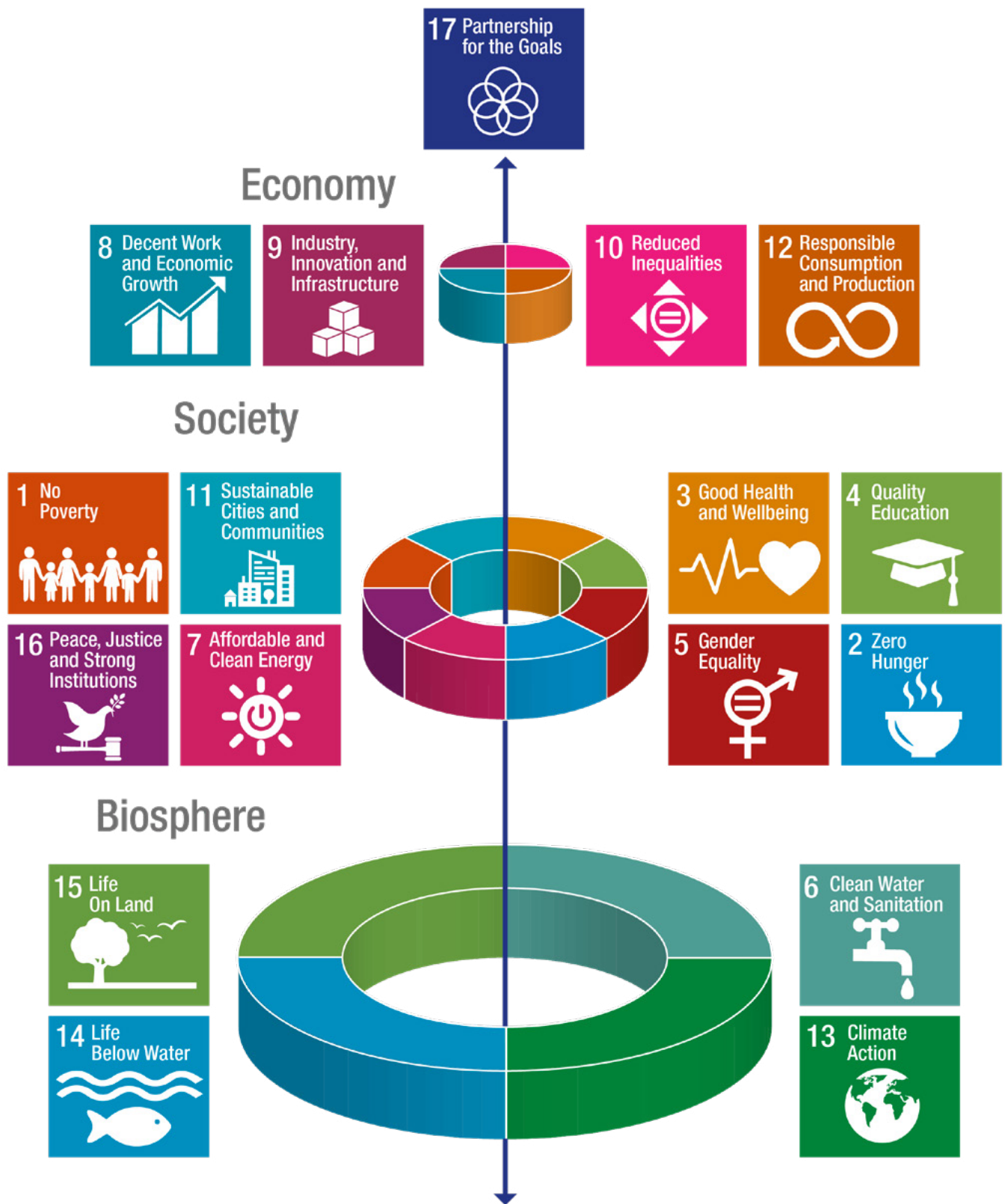
The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a call for action by all countries to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and address a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and protecting the environment.

The Environment Strategy aims to link each set of proposed actions and targets to improve our environment to the relevant SDGs. The 17 SDGs are detailed in Figure 2.





Figure 2: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



Azote for Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University.



B. Global Climate & Biodiversity Action

In committing to action under the UN SDGs, the UK is signatory to a number of international agreements on the environment, many of which underpin our local strategies, policy and legislation in Northern Ireland. A number of specific International agreements guide our local response and actions to address global concerns on climate change and sustainable use of biological diversity in our natural environment, both on land and at sea.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and associated Aichi targets shape the current NI Biodiversity Strategy 2015-2020 and the draft Peatland Strategy which will support the Environment Strategy. The Convention on Biodiversity COP15 conference in 2022 is crucial to the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and will direct our new Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and accompanying targets and actions for conserving, protecting and enhancing biological diversity in our natural environment ecosystems both on land and at sea. In the same period, the COP26 summit is bringing international parties together to accelerate action on climate change.

The Environment Strategy will therefore provide a coherent response to the global challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss addressed by these post-2020 international agreements, and the opportunity to align the actions and measures needed to address biodiversity and climate simultaneously.

C. Green Growth Strategy

The Green Growth Strategy is the Executive's overarching multi-decade plan for balancing climate, the environment and our economy. It will involve all parts of government and wider society working in collaboration from policy development to delivery.¹

The Environment Strategy will be one of the main strategies underpinning Green Growth. While other strategies will contribute more to the Green Growth aim regarding net zero carbon and a sustainable economy, the Environment Strategy provides the focus for conserving and enhancing our natural environment for the coming decades. The Environment Strategy and Green Growth Strategy are aligned and complementary.

In tackling climate change, the Executive is adopting a Green Growth approach - this means looking at climate action more holistically and considering it in the context of jobs and the environment. It means using the move from a high to a low greenhouse gas emissions economy to also improve people's quality of life through green jobs and a clean environment.

¹ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-draft-green-growth-strategy-northern-ireland>



D. Environmental Governance & Co-operation

Environmental Governance

Environmental governance is about making appropriate decisions on the environmental outcomes we are seeking to achieve and the effective and efficient deployment of our limited resources to achieve those outcomes - taking a strategic approach to the environmental challenges that we face both here and on the global stage. This Strategy will play a key role in this regard.

The New Decade, New Approach agreement includes a commitment to establish an independent environmental protection agency (IEPA). Whilst such a body cannot be created overnight, consideration will be given to appropriate options which will all require robust economic appraisal to determine the best option for Northern Ireland. The economic appraisal will need to scope all of the potential impacts, including significant legislative, financial and human resource issues, before decisions can be made and an IEPA included in a future Programme for Government.

The forthcoming UK Environment Act (the 'Act') covers a wide range of environmental matters and sets the agenda for environmental governance now that the UK has left the European Union. The core provisions of the Act are the:

- establishment of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP), a new independent environmental oversight body to assume a role previously undertaken by the European Commission; and
- preparation & publication of:
 - an Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) (it is intended that this Strategy will be adopted as the first such plan); and
 - a policy statement on environmental principles, to which all NI departments and UK Government Ministers making policy for Northern Ireland must have due regard.

An EIP is defined in the Act as: *“a plan for significantly improving the natural environment”*. It is not enough that it protects the environment, it must be designed to make it better and DAERA is required to set out the steps NI departments intend to take to improve the environment. The plan may also set out steps to improve people's enjoyment of the natural environment.

The first EIP must be published within 12 months of the relevant requirements becoming law and DAERA must publish annual progress reports. The EIP must be reviewed (and if necessary, revised) within five years of its publication. DAERA must also obtain (and publish) appropriate data in order to monitor progress on environmental improvement.



The OEP will be independent of both the NI Executive and UK Government and perform a number of statutory functions:

- **Monitoring & reporting on:** (i) the EIP; and (ii) environmental law (EL);
- **Handling complaints** of public authorities (PAs) failing to comply with EL;
- **Taking enforcement action** against PAs; and
- **Advising** on changes to NI EL.

The OEP will be tasked with holding government to account for the proper implementation of EL. Taking action against individuals or private businesses remains the responsibility of NIEA and other enforcement agencies.

The OEP is required to monitor progress against the EIP and publish annual reports within 6 months of DAERA's progress report. It may include consideration of how progress could be improved, and whether the data published by DAERA is adequate. DAERA must then respond to the OEP's annual report, addressing any recommendations made. This will deliver a new robust and independent mechanism to monitor environmental improvement, with reports published and laid before the NI Assembly.

Local/National/International Co-operation

The strategy seeks to adopt a holistic approach bearing in mind that environmental issues do not respect borders. We share the same air and water across these islands and have common landscapes, habitats and wildlife movement. This will require co-operation on a North/South basis as a single biogeographic unit as well as working on an East/West level with the other UK administrations to assess and report on the condition of our biodiversity, habitats and species.

As part of the implementation of the Environment Strategy we will seek, consider and share international knowledge and best practice, and embrace collaboration with international partners (including the other constituent nations of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland) to deliver improved benefits for Northern Ireland's environment.

Success will be achieved through partnership working between Departments, District Councils, community and voluntary organisations, business (including the agriculture sector) and environmental NGO partners. Such partnerships have already played a crucial role in helping to protect our environment and building on these will be essential to protect and significantly improve our environment in the years ahead.



E. Agriculture & Environment

Northern Ireland has a unique opportunity to redefine its agricultural policy for the first time in almost 50 years, with the aim of developing a framework that is better suited to local needs and one that will underpin long term sustainability within the industry. Business as usual for many farms will not be an option; the future is about doing more with less, in a sustainable and innovative way. Nature friendly farming is central to this, and future policy must allow farmers to have the best possible tools at their disposal to deliver on environmental outcomes.

There will be a strong central role for future agricultural policy measures that will deliver clear outcomes. Air quality, water quality, biodiversity, soil health and landscape are all heavily influenced by farming. Our environmental challenges can only be addressed if agriculture and farmers are part of the solution. We must join up our environmental ambitions with farm economic activity, where management of the environment becomes a profit centre within the farm business rather than a cost centre.

Work is ongoing with farmers as well as farmer and environmental organisations to develop future agricultural policy and schemes. Schemes to facilitate ecosystem restoration, and to address biodiversity loss, and water and air quality are under consideration as part of this policy development. The potential for nature friendly farming to have a positive impact on the success of future schemes is clearly recognised. Ensuring that farmers and landowners are supported to deliver environmental outcomes will make a significant contribution to restoring nature.

A sustainable agri-food industry which promotes health and well-being through locally sourced nutrition, which promotes a positive food culture and which connects people to their environment can be a driver of societal transformation. Nature is good for people, physically, mentally and spiritually. The Covid-19 pandemic has underlined this and there has been increased public interest in the environment, traceable and safe food, and connections across rural society more generally.

A world class agri-food sector is central to the health of Northern Ireland's economy and people. It not only impacts on the health, well-being and prosperity of the nearly 1.9 million people who live here, but also visitors to our country and people living in our export markets.

Our future agricultural regime must protect our environment, animal health & welfare, and public health - utilising greater innovation and capacity to promote efficient, productive practices. Consumers will increasingly demand high environmental, animal welfare and food safety & integrity standards, with an increased focus on transparency, traceability and provenance along the food chain.

The primary role of DAERA's Knowledge Advisory Service is the holistic development of farm and food businesses, where environmental and economic performance are inextricably linked, through the development and delivery of Knowledge and Technology Transfer, industry training, benchmarking and technical support to the industry. This ensures that the environmental sustainability, resilience and productivity of our land based and food processing industries are the primary focus, allowing better integration of environmental advice to support the agri-food sector.



The objective will be an industry that is environmentally responsible, efficient, adaptable, responsive and resilient in times of crisis and uses knowledge and evidence as primary tools to deliver sustained success. Northern Ireland can become an exemplar as to how, with a small environmental footprint and the highest standards of animal health & welfare, to both protect health and feed large numbers of people sustainably, efficiently and profitably.

F. Marine Environment

Northern Ireland's marine area is 6,819km² and represents approximately one third of our natural environment. The coast, and the seas around it, include highly productive and biologically diverse ecosystems. The seas provide the oxygen we breathe, store carbon dioxide we produce and are an important part of the water cycle and climate system. Our marine environment supports fishing, aquaculture, tourism and other marine industries that make up the '*blue economy*'.

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 provide mechanisms for managing the marine environment, including Marine Licensing, Marine Planning and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). The Fisheries Act 2020 provides a framework for the management of fishing and aquaculture activities.

Northern Ireland works with the other UK administrations to develop and implement the UK Marine Strategy to achieve good environmental status (GES) in our seas. Achieving GES is about protecting the marine environment, preventing its deterioration and restoring it where practical, while allowing sustainable use of marine resources. GES is underpinned by an ecologically coherent network of marine protected areas.

G. Built & Historic Environment

The built environment is a major component of our environment. How we maintain, reuse and enhance our built environment - whether in our large towns and cities, or in the countryside - will be a vital element in the success of the Environment Strategy. The Department for Communities (DfC) has a significant role in this area, with its responsibilities including housing, urban regeneration and the historic environment. The Department works closely with DAERA, the Department for Infrastructure, the Department for the Economy, district councils and others in fulfilling its remit.

Urban areas are centres of innovation and growth, and engines of economic development; but they are also major contributors to climate change, generating significant greenhouse gas emissions. Many cities have developed in low-lying areas and are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change - Belfast is a prime example of such a city. Blue / green infrastructure can not only assist the greening of our urban environment but also facilitate better water management and support safer, cleaner, sustainable spaces that allow interconnectivity, provide recreation spaces, and help communities to thrive economically and socially. There is also a need to examine incentives to repurposing existing buildings to address embodied energy, increasing energy efficiency and using renewable energy.



Access to good quality, affordable and sustainable homes that are appropriate to people's needs provides enhanced societal benefits including health and wellbeing. But use and reuse of housing, including appropriate construction, renovation and repurposing, can also play a vital role in emissions reduction while seeking to ensure a fair and just transition to carbon neutrality. The Housing Supply Strategy seeks to put people at the centre of supply, delivering on objective need underpinned by principles of fairness and equality. It will focus on meeting housing challenges, including reducing whole-life carbon emissions from both new homes and existing homes, increasing the provision of the right homes in the right locations, and the creation of thriving, attractive and sustainable communities where people want to live. A revised Fuel Poverty Strategy will align with other Executive Strategies and the overarching direction they set for our environment, climate change and energy efficiency.

Our historic environment and cultural heritage are major draws for visitors - from near and far - and a critical element of who we are and how we feel about ourselves. Our heritage is our authentic voice and distinctive character; it is the basis for our confidence, our prosperity, and our health. It binds us together, attracts investment, and improves quality of life. DfC is leading in the development of an Executive Culture Arts and Heritage Strategy that will complement this Environment Strategy and support achievement of the draft PfG Outcome that people want to live, work and visit here.

Plans for creating welcoming and sustainable places will therefore be vital in achieving the Environment Strategy, as well as delivering community and economic benefits.





3. Our Natural Environment

Our natural environment is our life support system and our greatest asset. For its size, Northern Ireland is amongst the most geologically diverse areas in the world and this shapes its varied and beautiful landscapes and rich nature, wildlife and habitats. The value of our natural heritage is reflected in the abundance and diversity of our wildlife and habitats, from our diverse marine life and internationally significant coastal waters, river and lake systems, to our important peatlands, oak woodlands, semi-natural grasslands and coastal habitats.

Our natural environment contributes to our prosperity and well-being in numerous ways. It provides the essential services for our life and work, from the air we breathe, the food we eat and the water we drink, to the resources for building our infrastructure. It protects our communities from flooding and extreme weather and supports our health and quality of life, providing open spaces for exercise, social engagement and mental well-being.

Our environment is also vital to our economy. Our landscapes and seascapes, wildlife, habitats, water and soil support our farming, food industry, business and tourism sectors and local economies in our rural areas. Healthy ecosystems will play a key role in combating climate change, removing carbon from the atmosphere and locking it into habitats on land and in sea, and helping us to adapt through flood alleviation. We will be increasingly reliant on a resilient and fully functioning natural environment, capable of continuing to provide a wide range of ecosystems services vital to the economy and society as a whole.

However our natural environment is under threat and significant action is needed to restore the health and vigour of the natural systems that sustain us. Pressures such as changes in agricultural practices, water and air pollution, development and invasive species, lead to habitat loss and fragmentation and associated species decline. Better protection and management of our natural capital assets is required to enhance ecosystem resilience and capacity to provide nature-based solutions to today's socio-environmental challenges.

The post-2020 global biodiversity framework, which is being negotiated under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) before its adoption at the Conference of the Parties (COP15) in 2022, sets out an ambitious plan to implement broad-based action to bring about a transformation in society's relationship with biodiversity, ensuring that by 2050 the shared vision of living in harmony with nature is fulfilled. The initial focus is to reverse biodiversity loss and create a nature-positive world by 2030, with the emphasis of this decade being on ecological restoration.

Taking action will create exciting opportunities for Northern Ireland, supporting our ambitions for Green Growth and developing new skills and products whilst supporting communities and helping nature to flourish. Our economy will be stronger and more resilient, and society will be healthier, fairer and more inclusive.



4. Natural Capital

Natural Capital refers to the world's stock of natural resources and includes geology, soils, air, water and all living organisms. These are all elements of the environment around us that provide us with food, clean air and water, wildlife, energy, wood, recreation and protection from hazards.

Natural capital assets provide a wide range of valuable ecosystem services that underpin our economy and society. We obtain benefit from these assets every day but if we keep drawing down our stock of natural capital without allowing or encouraging nature to recover, we run the risk of local, regional or even global ecosystem collapse. Working against nature by over exploiting natural capital can be disastrous as a decline in ecosystem productivity and resilience makes some regions more prone to extreme events such as floods and droughts which may result in substantial costs.

Valuing our natural capital is therefore central to the environment and connects each of the Strategic Environmental Outcomes set out in this strategy. A better understanding of the value and benefits that flow from natural capital will help to encourage more efficient, effective and sustainable use of our environment.

The development of a robust natural capital accounting and ecosystem condition framework will enable better consideration of the role of nature in our economy and our well-being and underpin other cross-cutting NI strategies and programmes. It will support actions in areas such as the circular economy, climate change, biodiversity, resource efficiency and sustainable production. It will also encourage more long-term thinking and consideration of all costs involved in a decision.

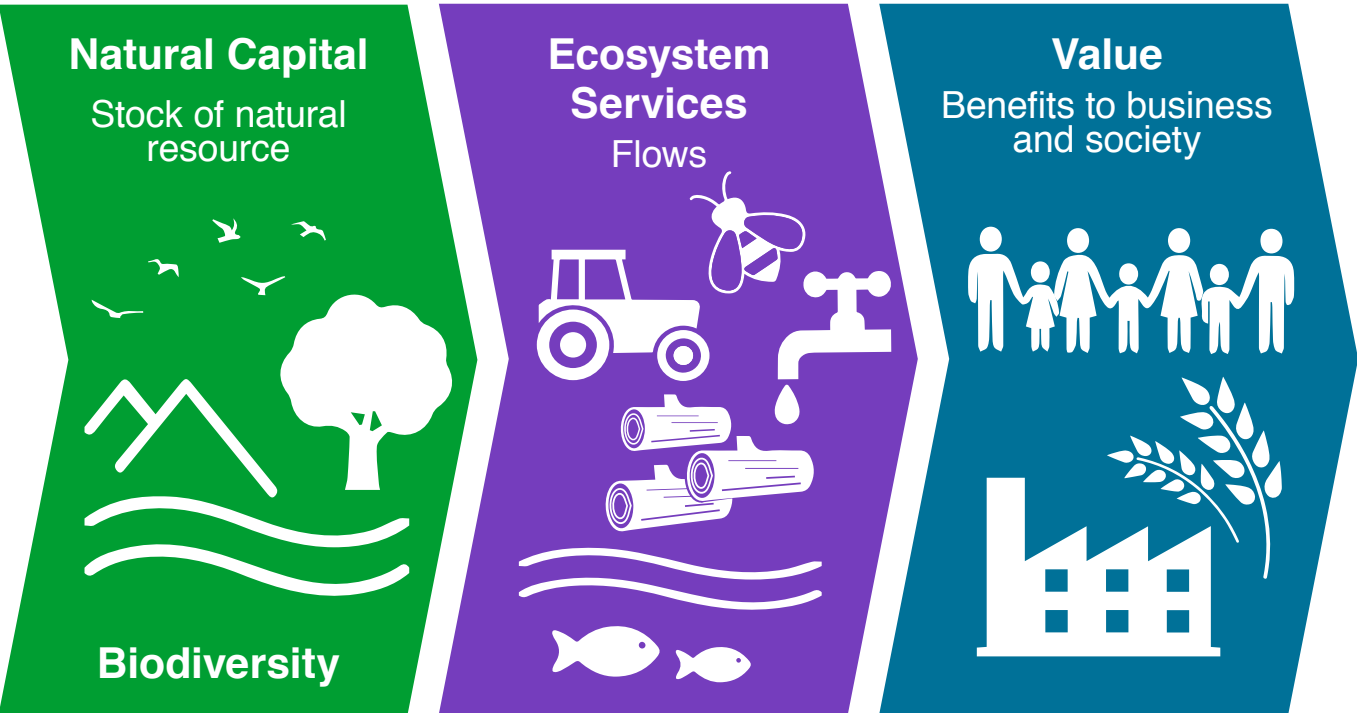
The recent Dasgupta Review on the Economics of Biodiversity, commissioned by HM Treasury, has called for transformative change in how we consider nature in national accounting and economic decision making.

In adopting a Natural Capital approach in Northern Ireland we will need to draw together economic, social and scientific evidence and provide practical approaches to enable people to value nature systematically and fully when they are making decisions on the ground. This will require high quality data on the location and condition of our natural assets and ecosystems; comprehensive modelling and assessment of how these ecosystems are changing over time; and accessible sources of information in a standard format which are kept up to date.

The aim is to integrate a Natural Capital approach into all policy making and investment decisions, and ensure we value and protect our natural assets to make Northern Ireland more resilient and deliver sustainable economic growth and well-being.



Figure 3: Natural Capital & Ecosystems





5. Strategic Environmental Outcomes

The six Strategic Environmental Outcomes (SEOs) for the Environment Strategy are as follows (Figure 4). These are based around the DAERA core vision of sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone and link to the outcomes from the 'Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework' (as consulted upon in 2021), including draft PfG Outcome: *"We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment"*.

Under each SEO are sets of proposals to improve our environment. Each set includes:

• Current Position: A summary of the current position in respect of the relevant environmental issue including an indication of performance against targets where appropriate.
• Actions: The steps departments intend to take to improve the environment (natural, built or historic).
• Targets: Specific goals or outputs relating to the actions set out in the proposal - these could be to achieve a defined level of performance or publish a key document such as a consultation or guidance for example.
• Vision/Outcomes: the intended/desired future outcome(s) which will in turn contribute to the achievement of the SEOs.

The other relevant SEOs and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which each set of actions contributes to, are shown for each set of proposals.



Figure 4: The Strategic Environmental Outcomes





Strategic Environmental Outcome 1

Excellent air, water, land & neighbourhood quality

This Strategic Environmental Outcome covers key elements of our environment including: air quality; water quality; land quality; and local environment quality. For many people, these environmental issues represent their day-to-day experience of 'the environment' - from the air they breathe, to the quality of their drinking water and the condition of their local neighbourhood.

1. Air Quality

Current Status

Monitoring stations measure air quality and generate reliable data demonstrating compliance, or otherwise, with legislation.

Of the three sites that measure PM_{2.5}, all pollutants met the EU Stage 1 (25 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) and EU Stage 2 (20 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) limit values (2019 report).

Whilst there are positive changes in some pollutant levels, others continue to exceed the more stringent Air Quality Standards objective.

96% of NI's ammonia emissions come from agriculture. From 2010 to 2017 agricultural ammonia emissions increased by 20%, reaching a level equivalent to the peak emissions of the late 1990s.

Rise due to increasing livestock numbers; greater use of indoor housing systems; and insufficient uptake of ammonia reduction measures.

The majority of designated sites are experiencing ammonia concentrations and levels of nitrogen deposition at which damage to plant life may occur.

Actions & Targets

- Improve traffic data on which to base modelling and projections.



- Continue funding improvements in local air quality and explore further funding available.



- 2022: Publish NI's first Clean Air Strategy and develop new SMART targets and actions.



- Address ammonia emissions and their impacts through the forthcoming Ammonia Strategy.



- Develop improved monitoring and data collection to allow us to measure the impacts of energy decarbonisation policies on air quality.
- Integrate Farm Business Support Schemes with Ammonia Strategy.

Future Vision/Outcome

Cleaner air in Northern Ireland.

Fewer pollutants released by home heating systems.

Increased public awareness of health effects of poor air quality and sources of pollution.

Improved monitoring network.

Ammonia emissions reduced to a point where critical loads of nitrogen deposition and critical levels of ammonia are not being exceeded at any designated sites.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





2. Water Resources: Quality & Quantity

Current Status

UK Water Framework Regulation water quality indicators:

No. or % achieving Good Environmental Standard (GES):

- All Waterbodies: 37%
- Marine: 10 of 25 (TRaC)
- Rivers: 31%
- Groundwater: 84%
- Lakes: 1 of 21

Rivers and lakes are showing deterioration, whilst our coastal and transitional water bodies remain unchanged.

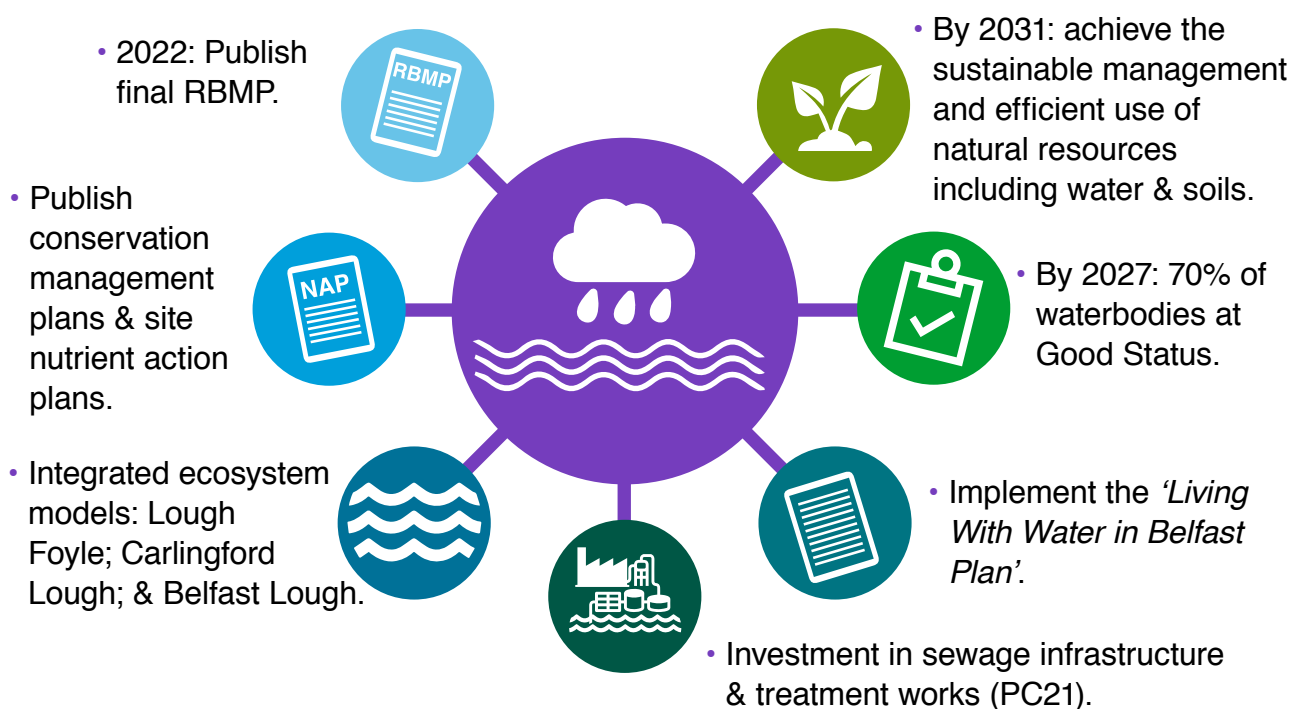
In some areas, phosphorus levels in freshwaters are now increasing due to agricultural inputs which is a major concern, as around 39% of our water bodies do not meet targets for good water quality for this reason.

Nutrients Action Programme (NAP) measures in place for 2019-2022.

NI Water has a number of statutory environmental responsibilities and obligations. These include drinking water quality, wastewater quality, reducing pollution and a duty to prepare and maintain a water resources management plan (now called the 'Water Resource and Supply Resilience Plan').

NI Water's Water Strategy 2021-2046 emphasises that it contributes to, and relies upon, the quality of the natural environment and sets out how it strives to protect it by working in an environmentally responsible manner, demonstrating high standards of environmental care and operational performance.

Action, Targets





River Basin Management Plans (RBMP) Programme of Measures:

- Reduce phosphorus and nutrient content of concentrate feed.
- Reduce use of chemical fertilisers.
- Minimised and correct use of pesticides.
- Licencing of slurry spreading contractors.
- Address gap on farm level nutrient management data.
- Greater phasing in of Low Emission Slurry Spreading Equipment requirements for more farms.
- Potential new overall Phosphorus & Nitrogen Balance targets.
- Consider & implement recommendations of the NAP review 2019-22; and consider for future NAP 2023-26.
- By 2031 the nutrient surplus in soils has been reduced.

Future Vision/Outcome

An environment with high water environment standards which supports biodiversity and contributes to health and well-being and a living and productive landscape.

More sustainable nutrient management on farms - chemical and organic fertilisers are only applied based on soil requirements and intended land use.

Reduced levels of nitrates and phosphorus in NI waterbodies.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





3. Marine and Coastal Water Resources: Quality & Quantity

Current Status

UK Water Framework Regulation standards - in 2018, 10 of 25 marine waterbodies achieved Good Status (TRaC).

60% failed to achieve Good Status due to elevated nutrient levels and the presence of certain pesticides.

Main cause of failure is from catchment-based inputs.

Eutrophication is not an issue in waters more than one mile from shore and outside the sea loughs.

UK Marine Strategy environmental status assessments in 2018: for Eutrophication, Contaminants, and Contaminants in Seafood - Good Environmental Status (GES) was largely achieved. Marine Litter did not achieve GES. Underwater Noise requires more study of impacts before a status assessment can be made.

In 2020 33% of Shellfish Water Protected Areas met guideline standards.

In 2020 100% of identified bathing waters achieved the minimum standard, with 65% achieving the excellent standards.

Climate change pressures on the Northern Ireland marine area include: sea level rise, increased storminess, ocean acidification, and rising temperatures.

Action & Targets



Within the context of the Northern Ireland Marine Plan:

- Implement the Water Framework Regulations through delivery of Third Cycle River Basin Management Plans (2022-27).



- Implement water quality improvement projects and catchment-based improvement projects, and invest in sewage infrastructure & treatment works (PC21):
 - Dundrum Bay Pilot
 - SWELL project
 - Living with Water programme
- Develop and implement NI Plastics Strategy and revise and implement DAERA Marine Litter Strategy (or as part of a proposed wider Litter Strategy).
- Establish an ocean acidification monitoring programme and raise awareness of potential impacts on marine ecosystems, including fisheries & aquaculture.
- Collaborate with other UK administrations and OSPAR contracting parties to manage marine noise.

Future Vision/Outcome

A healthy NI marine area which is managed sustainably for the economic, environmental and social prosperity of present and future generations.

We aim to achieve this by managing and protecting the marine environment, preventing its deterioration and restoring it where practical, while allowing sustainable use of marine resources, and ensuring it is resilient and adaptable to climate change.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





4. Sustainable Drainage & Wastewater Management

Current Status

The Long-Term Water Strategy (2015-2040) currently links all aspects of water management and sets out the principles behind the need for an integrated approach.

Water Regulation Reform is at its early stages with a significant number of work packages focusing on the delivery of sustainable drainage and wastewater.

'Living with Water Programme' (LWWP) projects and Strategic Integrated Drainage Programme (SIDP) led by DfI seeking to apply a holistic integrated approach to designing urban drainage and wastewater systems.

Pilot case studies underway for inclusion of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) at the design stage of housing developments.

Flood Risk Management Plans are an important part of the implementation of the Water Environment (Floods Directive) Regulations (NI) 2009.

The Social & Environmental Guidance for Water and Sewerage Services (2021-2027) aims to ensure NI Water meets its environmental obligations and works to operate sustainably, taking account of climate change.

Actions & Targets

- 
- Implementation of SuDS in all capital schemes delivered by NI Departments, where possible.
 - Inclusion of SuDS training for relevant sectors.
 - Undertake Water Regulation Reform work programme.
 - Implement Flood Risk Management Plan 2021-27.
 - Engagement with district councils to include SuDS in Local Development Plans.
 - Implementation of Integrated Ecosystem Modelling in the consenting methodology to design sustainable technology.
- Commence required six yearly review of 2015-40 Strategy.
 - Establishment of an appropriate approval system for SuDS at the design stage.
 - Deliver significant capital investment in Event and Duration Monitors to assess the performance of the NI Water asset and fully understand the volume of untreated sewage spilled to the environment.



- Potential new NI specific SuDS Guidelines for Sectors.
- Review of the 'Statement of Regulatory Position & Intent' for NI Water to clearly set out how NIEA will regulate NI Water over the next 2 decades.
- Through the LWWP, develop and deliver strategic drainage infrastructure plans for Belfast and other identified Areas of Potential Significant Flood Risk.

Future Vision/Outcome

Principles of sustainable drainage applied across all industries to manage water in a more sustainable manner, where possible, resulting in improvements in the environment, prevention/reduction of flood risk, and reduction of pollution from combined wastewater sewers.

Reformed regulation of point sources discharges to ensure sustainable drainage principles are applied where possible.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





5. Neighbourhood Environment Quality

Current Status

DAERA introduced the 2011 Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act.

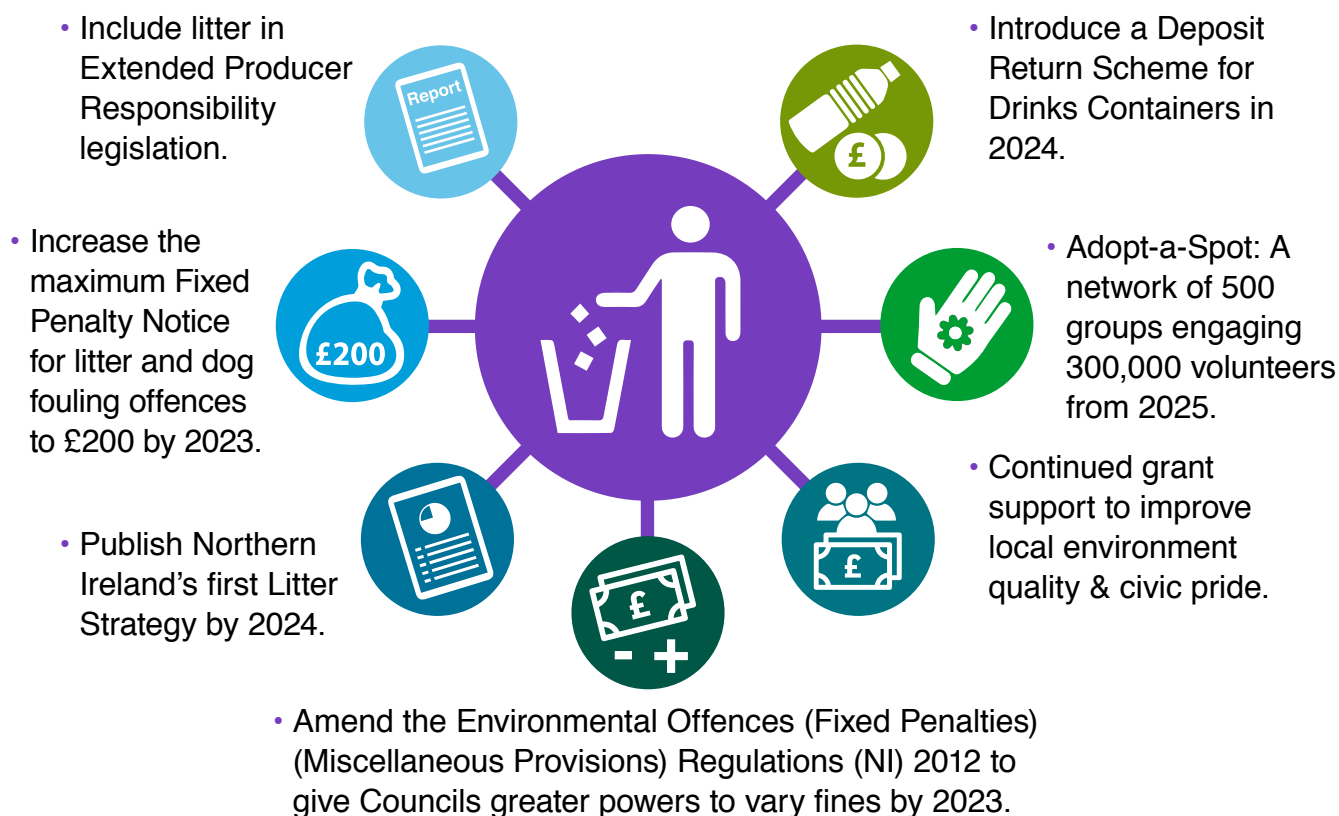
Councils can currently issue fines of up to £80 for litter offences. The number of fixed penalties issued rose to a peak of 4,218 in 2017 but has declined since.

The annual litter survey indicates that litter volumes have been increasing again in recent years and many Councils have requested the power to increase fines.

Northern Ireland doesn't currently have an overarching Litter Strategy.

Keep NI Beautiful's 'Live Here, Love Here' annual survey includes 'admitted littering'. This will be the initial means of measuring societal attitudes to littering.

Actions & Targets





Future Vision/Outcome

By 2030, create cleaner communities with less litter and instil communities with civic pride.

By 2035, bring about a societal behavioural shift, where littering is socially unacceptable and the costs for clearing litter are significantly reduced in real terms.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





6. Dilapidated Buildings & Neglected Sites

Current Status

Dilapidated buildings can ruin the appearance of an area with negative impacts on business, property values, anti-social behaviour, tourism potential and civic pride.

Much of the legislation used by councils dates back to the mid-19th century and/or applies to limited geographical areas.

There is also a significant legislative deficit in NI compared with other jurisdictions, which have access to power to deal with dilapidation at a much easier stage.

Actions & Targets

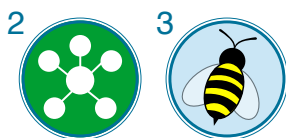


Future Vision/Outcome

Provide all district councils with a modern, fit-for-purpose NI-wide enforcement regime to deal with the negative impact of dilapidated/dangerous buildings and neglected sites.

The maintenance of attractive and successful places in which people are happy to live, work and visit.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





Strategic Environmental Outcome 2

Healthy & accessible environment & landscapes everyone can connect with & enjoy

There is no debating the fact that our environment is our single greatest asset. It is key to our well-being, both in an economic sense and in terms of our general physical, mental and social health - as individuals and as a society.

Engaging with people of all ages, communities, business, local and central government and the third sector will be crucial to the delivery and success of the Environment Strategy. This includes both physically engaging people with the natural and historic environment - through the provision of quality natural spaces and opportunities for outdoor recreation & learning - and engaging people and organisations with the processes and interventions that will improve our environment in the coming years and decades.

7. Connecting People to the Environment: Landscapes, Seascapes & Natural Beauty

Current Status

Northern Ireland's stunning range of landscapes and seascapes are a vital resource, valued for their scenic, ecological and historical qualities which contribute to NI's distinctive identity.

Shaped by nature and people, the variations in geology, soils, landform, biodiversity, land use, vegetation, field boundaries, settlement patterns, building styles and cultural or historical associations all combine to give rise to different landscapes, each with its own distinctive character and sense of place.

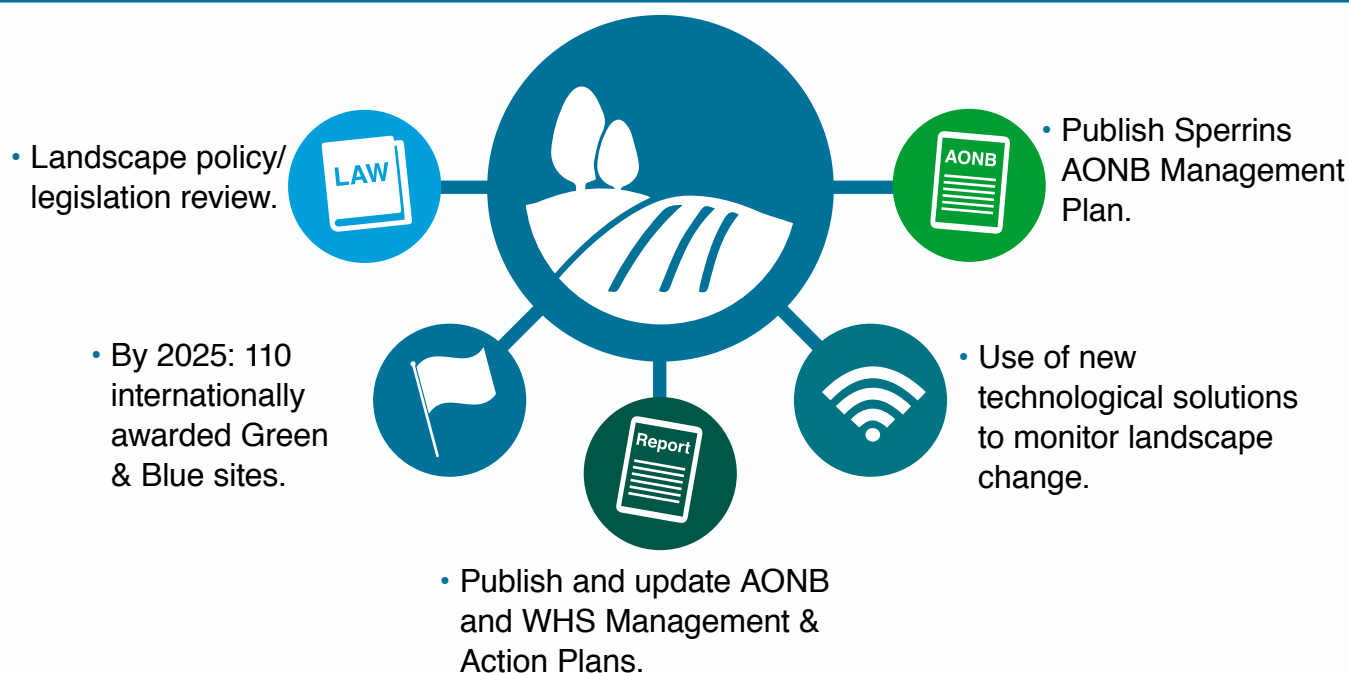
The incredible diversity of NI's landscape character has been highlighted in the NI Landscape Character Assessment Series, the NI Regional Landscape Character Assessment and the NI Regional Seascape Character Assessment.

There are also special concentrations of landscape and seascape assets across NI, many of which have been recognised by their designation as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) for reasons of scenic quality, unspoilt character, sense of place, conservation interest, cultural and recreational value. In addition NI hosts the spectacular Giant's Causeway & Causeway Coast World Heritage Site (WHS) which is recognised worldwide for its outstanding universal value.

The UK government has signed and ratified the European Landscape Convention which is dedicated to the protection, management and planning of our landscapes. It provides a people-centred and forward-looking way to reconcile management of the environment with the social and economic challenges of the future, and aims to help people reconnect with place.



Actions & Targets

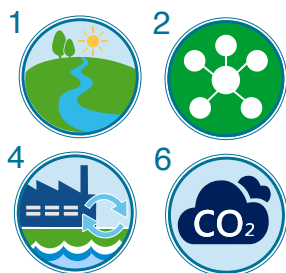


- Publish refreshed AONB guide to designation.
- Update Landscape & Seascapes Character Assessments.
- By 2027 develop long term strategic ways forward for the management, planning, enhancement & protection of our landscapes & seascapes.
- The Department for Infrastructure will work co-operatively with DAERA on changes to regional planning policy.

Future Vision/Outcome

The natural beauty and character of our landscapes & seascapes is protected, maintained, enhanced & enjoyed by everyone.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





8. Connecting People to the Environment: Outdoor Recreation & Natural Space Provision

Current Status

There is evidence that increased connection with nature during time spent outdoors is aligned with greater care and concern for the environment and increased pro-nature conservation behaviours.

Outdoor recreation plays a vital role in NI, bringing benefits to society by contributing to a wide range of areas, including improving health and well-being, protecting the environment, tackling inequality, growing and greening the economy, increasing active travel, and enhancing education and learning.

There are lessons to be learnt from the Covid-19 Pandemic and how people relied on outdoor physical activities for their daily exercise. This highlighted the need for safe, high quality, accessible and welcoming spaces and places.

There is fragmented provision of varying quality and accessibility of walking, cycling and equestrian routes and green spaces across NI.

Open Space Strategies and outdoor recreation plans have been drawn up for a number of councils and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Protection and Promotion of Access to and sustainable use of publicly owned land for sport and physical activity.

Implementation of Strategic Planning Policy Statement including section on Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation.

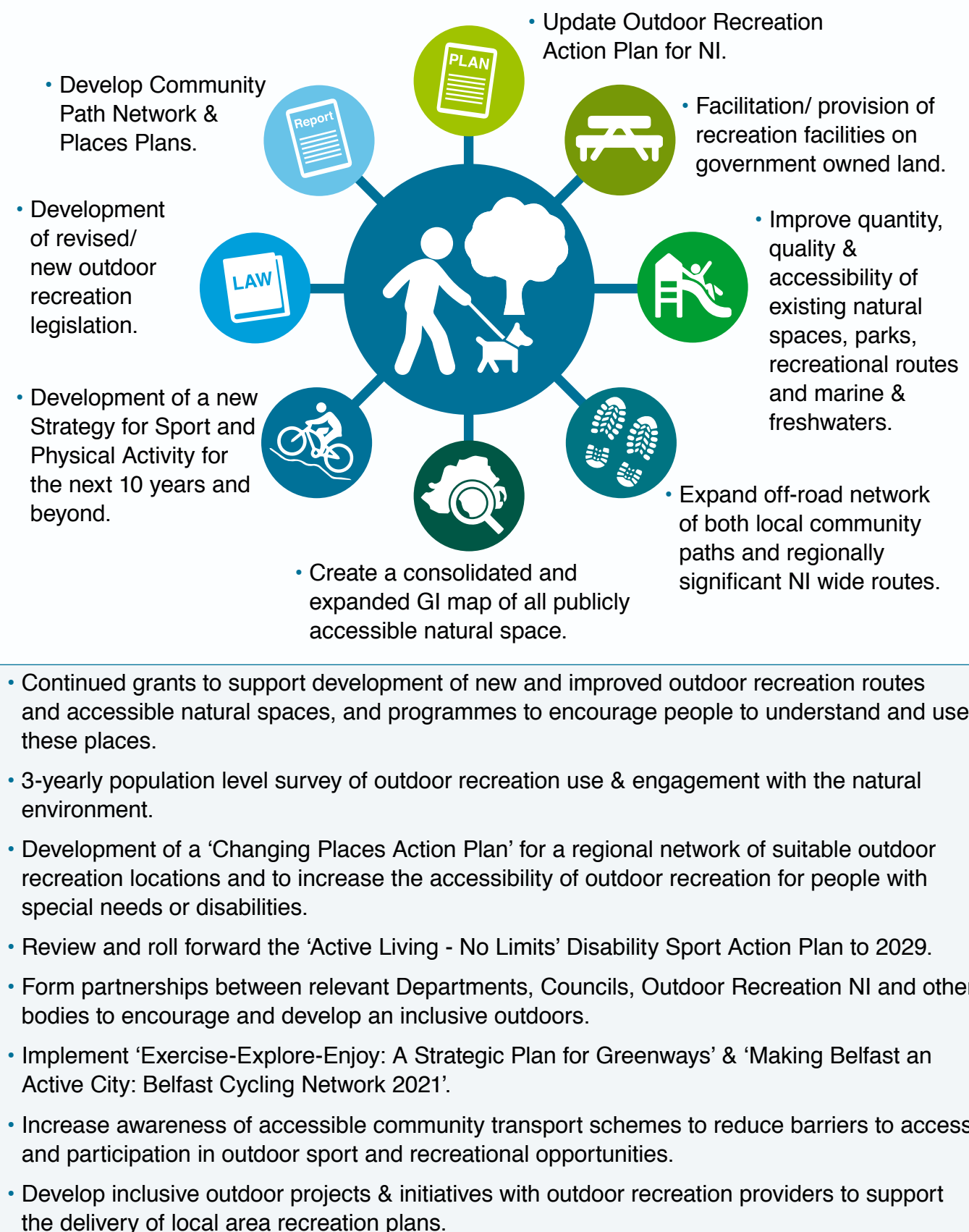
Existing legislation for the provision of outdoor recreation is under review.

Recent research shows that 29% of people considered that they do not have greenspace within easy walking distance of their home and only 27% of the population were meeting the Chief Medical Officer's physical activity targets through leisure time spent outdoors (150+ mins/week or 75+ mins at a vigorous level).

In 2019 outdoor recreation in NI was worth around £130m and was associated with nearly 5,000 full time equivalent employees.



Actions & Targets





- Develop programmes of activity to increase participation in outdoor recreation in the natural environment in sections of the population where levels are low.
- The Department for Infrastructure will work co-operatively with DAERA with regard to regional planning policy and local developments plans.

Future Vision/Outcome

People, places and nature are connected through nature rich routes.

Everyone is enabled to connect to the natural environment, each other and their local services through a network of sustainable quality off-road green routes and spaces.

Everyone has access to inclusive, shared, welcoming and high-quality outdoor sports and physical activity infrastructure.

A safe, economically and environmentally sustainable local and regional sports and physical activity infrastructure.

A national greenways network linking population centres and our best landscapes and habitats, encouraging active travel, understanding of and benefits for the environment, people's health and well-being and the rural and tourism economy.

Local people are engaged in protecting, managing and improving these routes and places. Everyone appreciates and respects the environments they visit and those that manage and visit them.

Landowners and managers are enabled to provide informal outdoor recreation on their properties without significant disruption to their business.

By 2050:

90% of households have publically accessible quality natural space >2ha within 400m of their home and at least one site >20ha in size within 2km.

90% of the population visiting the natural outdoors at least once a week.

Every child aged 4-11 spends 1+ hours in nature rich settings each month.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





9. Environment Engagement Index (EEI)

Current Status

The EEI is unique to NI and explores engagement and connection to nature through an annual survey.

Research has shown if people are more connected to nature they are more likely to look after it.

A baseline survey has been completed across a wide range of demographics (data collected from online/telephone surveys and from natural reach through the web-app).

The annual survey results will be used to track changes in the relationship between society and nature over time.

Actions & Targets



- Use survey results to better understand people's connection with the environment.
- Further develop the survey to focus on different aspects of environmental engagement.

Future Vision/Outcome

To demonstrate how DAERA's education and awareness raising initiatives are having a positive impact on people and their relationship with the environment.

Actions also contribute to SEOs

UN Sustainable Development Goals





10. The Next Generation

Current Status

Eco-Schools is a highly successful global programme in which NI has been a leading performer.

As of 2015, every school in Northern Ireland is a registered Eco-School - a world first.

Partnering with organisations such as Keep NI Beautiful (KNIB) and Ulster Wildlife has played a central role in engaging young people in environmental issues.

KNIB’s Eco-Schools programme and Ulster Wildlife’s *‘Our Bright Future’* (a partnership led by the Wildlife Trusts, bringing together the youth and environmental sectors to deliver change for the local environment) have been instrumental in engaging the next generation in the development of the Environment Strategy.

The NI Executive’s Children & Young People’s Strategy 2020-2030 aims to improve the environmental well-being of all our children and young people

National Museums NI’s (NMNI) Natural Sciences collections and the Centre for Environmental Data and Recording (CEDaR) are two key resources for unlocking public access to and understanding of environmental issues.

NMNI recently joined the EC’s Global Coalition for Biodiversity.

Libraries NI reading programmes for children encourage greater understanding of environmental issues. Reading challenges have encouraged more than 12,000 children to read more and to engage in environmental activities.

Actions & Targets

- Engage with our children and young people to provide them with opportunities to learn about, actively engage with, and positively shape the natural environment.
- 2023: Championing a group of ‘30 under 30’ environmental leaders.

- 500 Adopt A Spot Groups and 300,000 volunteers engaged in practical environmental programmes.
- 2025: 160,000 pupils and students actively engaged in Eco-Schools.
- 2025: 50% of schools will have an Eco-Schools Green Flag.



- Explore opportunities to partner with a third party organisation to establish Education Bases at up to 4 outdoor DAERA sites with varying habitats (coastal/marine, woodland, pond dipping, wildflower meadows, riverine, freshwater, peatland, groundwater), and deliver an on-site environmental education programme encompassing biodiversity, climate change and resources.

Future Vision/Outcome

Highly engaged and well educated future generations with the necessary knowledge, skills and behaviours to drive societal change.

Children and young people can: access and interact with the natural environment at home, in school and in daily activities; and work to improve and enhance the quality of the environments in which they live, learn and play.

Museum collections and the knowledge we hold about them will be recognised as essential 'big data', routinely accessed to progress research, inform debate and influence decision making.

NMNI Natural Sciences experts will help audiences understand the environmental issues that affect society and how they can take action and make a difference, at a personal and local level.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





11. Sustainable Settlements

Current Status

The problems facing our settlements reflect the changing way that we use them. This changes the nature of what makes a 'high street' sustainable. From a policy perspective, we need to support interventions which develop town centres as multifunctional social centres.

The impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic and the resultant impact on village, town and city centres has reinforced the need for a coordinated strategic response to both the immediate and longer term recovery priorities.

This provides the opportunity to shift the perception of the high street away from the traditional economic model and towards one that addresses social, environmental and economic sustainability.

DfC currently supports the development of Masterplans and provides financial support for Public Realm and Environmental Improvement schemes, Comprehensive Development schemes, the award of Urban Development Grants, Revitalisation schemes, the Heritage Regeneration Fund and support for the development of Business Improvement Districts.

DfI has invested in walking & cycling infrastructure and sustainable public transport, and has created a 'Blue/Green Infrastructure Fund' to support transformation of our communities and promotion of active travel.

Public Realm schemes increasingly support walking, cycle provision, and increased soft landscaping to improve active travel and increase green infrastructure and sustainable environments.

Quite a number of our city and town centres currently use unsustainable water management techniques and are not future proofed for climate change.

Actions & Targets

- Build and strengthen the resilience of our villages, towns and cities by creating places where people want to live and work, to visit and invest.
- Develop and support sustainability and Green Growth.
- Work across Government to promote the Greenway network encouraging walking and cycling and reducing car dependency.
- Drive inclusive growth through our rich and diverse cultural heritage.
- Grow and scale community wealth building to support economic recovery.
- Secure the long-term future of the Housing Executive's social housing stock for future generations.





- Invest in regeneration, community assets and all parts of our housing economy, including making best use of public land for housing, maximising social value and adopting a people centred approach to investment in our towns and cities.
- Implementation of Greenways and Bicycle Plans; Development of Transport Plans and use Blue/Green Infrastructure Fund to promote health and wellbeing, better cities and towns and sustainable transport.
- Build financial capability and sustainability of Local Government to ensure they can deliver key public services and support aligned to the Programme for Government.
- Ensure scheme designs are climate resilient, including Belfast Tidal Project, water management such as attenuation of storm water run-off (SuDS), and address air quality issues through the use of soft landscaping.
- Integrate existing, and incorporate new, natural features into housing development to support quality of place, biodiversity and water management, and address climate change mitigation and resilience.

Future Vision/Outcome

Sustainable city, town and village centres which are thriving places for people to do business, socialise, shop, be creative and use public services as well as being great places to live

Changed perceptions from a traditional economic model to a more sustainable, Living High Streets model that addresses social, environmental and economic aspects of our High Streets

Well-designed, sustainable places with a strong identity give their users, occupiers and owners a sense of pride, helping to create and sustain communities and neighbourhoods

Better health and well-being through promotion of walking, cycling and sustainable transport

Better connected communities and city centres through greenway & cycleway networks

Sustainable water management is the norm for our settlements

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





12. Historic Environment

Current Status

The historic environment is the basis for our confidence, our prosperity, and our health. There are over 17,000 heritage assets on the Sites and Monuments Record, and over 9,000 listed buildings. Condition surveys have shown that overall condition of the assets is declining, and there is growth in the number of entries on the Heritage at Risk register.

Around 90% of monuments are on agricultural land and the condition of many of them is deteriorating.

Current agricultural support arrangements do not encourage farmers to care for historic monuments on their land.

The planning policy framework in place for the last 20 years is being replaced with Local Development Plans.

Heritage assets are becoming subject to new and varied threats through the impacts of Climate Change.

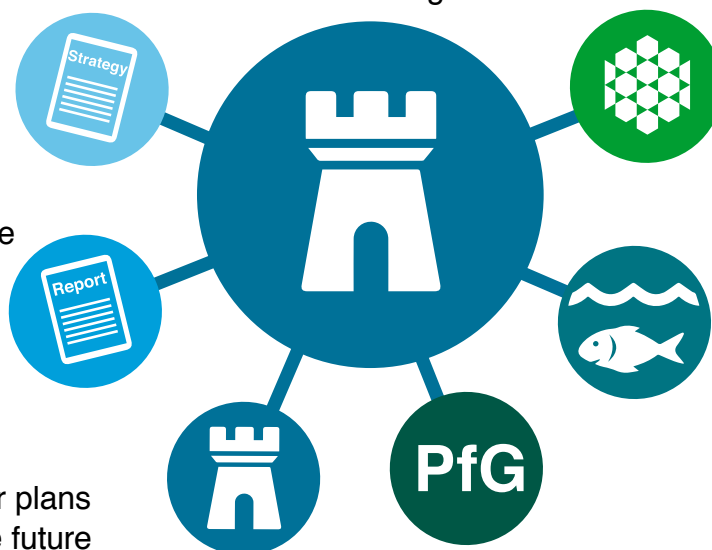
Health and well-being benefits of the historic environment for communities need to be better understood and valued.

The UK Fisheries Act 2020 has highlighted that heritage assets are an intrinsic part of the marine & aquatic environment.

The Rules annexed to the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage have been adopted by HM Government as being '*best practice*'.

Actions & Targets

- Develop and implement a Culture Arts and Heritage Strategy which embeds environmental outcomes.
- Update condition surveys and ensure appropriate actions are planned as a result of them.
- Bring forward clear plans and options for the future management and conservation of the State Care Monuments.
- Continue to support owners and communities to identify sustainable uses and management of heritage assets for current and future generations.
- Integrate marine and aquatic historic environment considerations into all decision-making processes and assessments of environmental impacts.
- Continue to work across the historic environment sector and with communities to progress actions which support delivery of PfG outcomes and key strategies.





- Work with councils to inform local development plans and development management decisions which align with treaties and best practice to conserve, protect, enhance and realise the value of our historic environment; alongside management of licensing and consenting regimes which also support this.
- Work with DAERA to ensure heritage assets are included within marine and aquatic environment legislation and policies.
- Work with TNI and Councils to build further on the Prospectus for Change as a blueprint for our cultural heritage tourism offering.
- Work across Departments in relation to future agricultural support in order to recognise the extent and importance of the historic environment which is situated on agricultural land.
- Progress research on the specific climate change challenges and opportunities for heritage assets, and use this as the basis for advice, guidance and action.
- Ensure that Government Departments and their ALBs lead by example, as required by the Protocol for the Care of the Government Historic Estate.

Future Vision/Outcome

A well-maintained historic environment which supports our prosperity, strengthens our society and shapes our character.

An historic environment which is protected for future generations.

Resilient communities which gain physical, educational and well-being benefits from the historic environment.

An historic environment which is sustainable connected and managed as a vital part of our diverse environment.

Increased understanding of the relationships between our natural and historic environment, culture and arts, enabling collaboration and leading to benefits for our local communities and economy.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





Strategic Environmental Outcome 3

Thriving, resilient & connected nature and wildlife

We are an integral part of nature, and reliant on nature to sustain life. We can positively impact nature as we engage with it, protecting, maintaining and enhancing a clean and healthy environment as we live, work and play. However we can also cause harm to the environment, and this negative engagement is increasingly causing impacts to health, well-being and future sustainability.

13. Protecting Nature on Land

Current Status

Further work is required to achieve favourable conservation status across Northern Ireland's priority habitats and for our priority species.

The protected site network of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) covers 8.9% of Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland's biodiversity is under pressure due to various factors, with much in unfavourable condition and ~11% of species threatened with extinction across the island. Key reports in 2019 reported concerning trends in abundance indicators for a suite of species in NI and widespread loss, degradation and fragmentation of habitats.

Conservation management plans are being developed for our 54 terrestrial SACs.

DAERA is consulting on a draft Peatland Strategy for NI 2021-2040, which sets out a framework for conserving and restoring our precious peatland habitats and biodiversity and providing nature-based solutions to climate change.

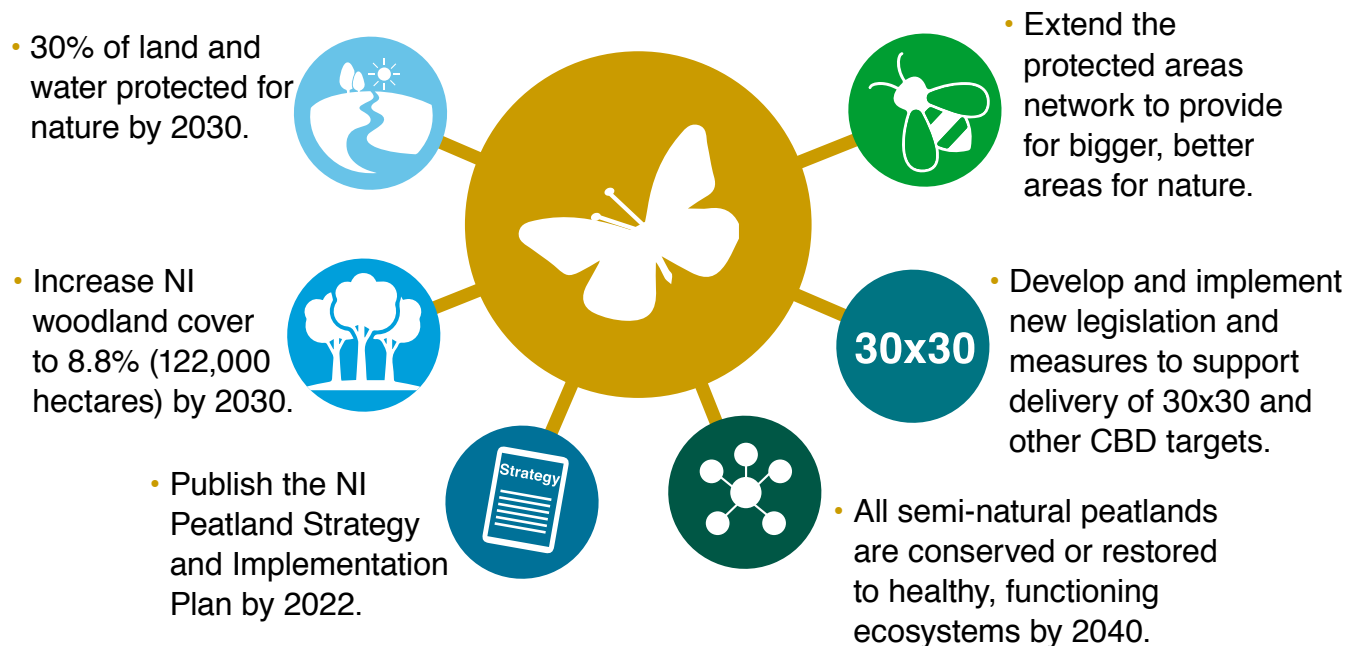
Light Pollution

Light pollution has increased as a result of the illumination of our streets and roads, our buildings and agricultural greenhouses, as well as other sites. It is known to cause environmental harm, has a probable adverse effect on human health, and wastes electricity.

White LEDs lamps, often found in street lights emit wavelengths of blue light, potentially increasing sky glow. These wavelengths are also known to affect animals, including humans more than LED lamps emitting warm amber glow.



Actions & Targets



- Develop and publish a new Biodiversity Strategy 2030 by 2022 to enable achievement of post-2020 international commitments (CBD) and delivery of UK Biodiversity Framework.
- Develop and implement action plans to address specific pressures on nature including ammonia, wildfires, invasive species, pollinators, and climate change adaptation.
- Develop and implement nature recovery plans and programmes, including nature based solutions, for protected sites, priority habitats and species, and nature recovery networks.
- DAERA will work co-operatively with other Government Departments, authorities and stakeholders to enhance protection for nature, deliver biodiversity gain and support landscape scale ecosystem restoration.
- Integrate post 2020 international targets agreed at the Biodiversity Conference of the Parties (COP15) and climate change into DAERA strategies.
- Enhance our terrestrial biodiversity monitoring and evidence base and integrate into national accounting and reporting systems.
- Deliver the 'Forests for our Future' Programme including associated conservation and protection measures for long established woodland and habitats of conservation concern
- Develop funding mechanisms to support stakeholder action towards becoming 'nature positive' by 2030 including partnership and Green Finance solutions for nature recovery.
- Create or restore 75,000ha of wildlife rich habitat outside the protected site network (focusing on priority habitats and supported by nature-friendly land management).



- Restore 75% of 150,000 hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition (securing their wildlife value for the future).
- Promotion of the concept of a 'Dark Sky City', utilising smart lighting management systems, low colour temperature amber LEDs, minimising waste, promoting a sustainable environment.
- Reducing unnecessary light emissions as an element in reducing energy usage and the impact on nature.

Future Vision/Outcome

Northern Ireland will be Nature Positive by 2030 and living in harmony with nature by 2050.

Our vision is to have healthy, functioning, thriving and resilient nature and ecosystems across Northern Ireland's landscapes, which contributes valuable ecosystem services, climate resilience and well-being for current and future generations.

We will do this by protecting, managing, restoring, extending and connecting our natural ecosystems and the species that rely on them.

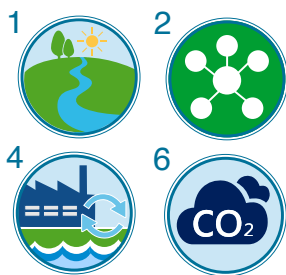
Measures are in place to address pressures and threats originating from human activity and ensure our nature is resilient and adaptable to climate change.

Biodiversity loss in NI is halted, gains in biodiversity are real and measurable, habitats and species have achieved favourable status.

Increased woodland cover has improved our carbon sink, created new woodland habitat and enhanced biodiversity as part of a wider nature recovery network, helped with flood alleviation, improved water quality and is valued and protected as an integral part of the lives of all citizens living in NI.

Reduced light pollution through reductions in light emitted from our homes and businesses at night.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





14. Protecting Nature at Sea

Current Status

Further work is required to achieve Good Environmental Status under the UK Marine Strategy descriptors for biodiversity and food webs.

The MPA network represents 38.1% of the Northern Ireland inshore region.

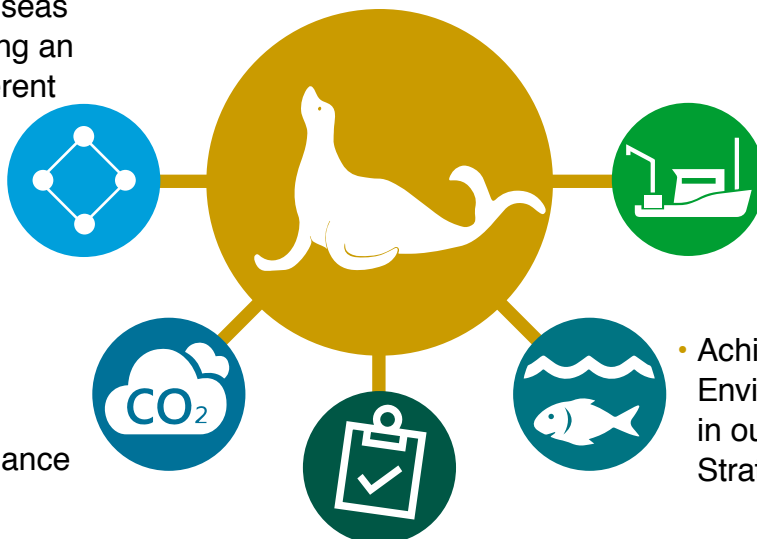
Area of marine protected sites under favourable management = 115km² in 2020/21.

Management plans are being developed for all MPAs and due to be published in 2022.

Climate change pressures on the Northern Ireland marine area include: sea level rise, increased storminess, ocean acidification, and rising temperatures.

Actions & Targets

- By 2030: 30% of seas protected, ensuring an ecologically coherent & well managed MPA network.
- By 2030: DAERA will develop specific measures to protect and enhance relevant carbon sequestration and storage habitats.
- Develop fisheries policies aligned to objectives in UK Fisheries Act 2020.
- Achieve Good Environmental Status in our seas (UK Marine Strategy).
- Develop & implement:
 - Marine invasive species action plans;
 - Effective MPA management & restoration plans.



- Through the Coastal Forum DAERA, DfI, district councils and environmental stakeholders will work collaboratively to progress coastal management issues.
- Integrate post 2020 international targets relating to biologically diverse and healthy seas, and climate change into DAERA strategies.
- Implement UK Marine Strategy Programme of Measures and UK Dolphin and Porpoise Conservation Strategy.
- Develop and implement post 2020 MPA Strategy and Seabird Conservation Strategy for NI.
- Extend and adapt the MPA network to develop climate resilience and increase protection of carbon storage habitats.
- Integrate marine biodiversity into accounting and reporting systems.

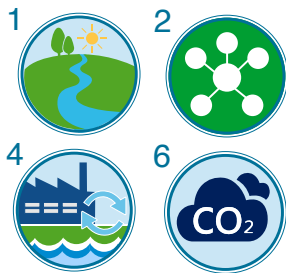


Future Vision/Outcome

A healthy Northern Ireland marine area which is managed sustainably for the economic, environmental and social prosperity of present and future generations.

We aim to achieve this by managing and protecting the marine environment, preventing its deterioration and restoring it where practical, while allowing sustainable use of marine resources, and ensuring it is resilient and adaptable to climate change.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





15. Natural Capital

Current Status

There is a recognised need for a comprehensive Natural Capital (NC) and ecosystem framework for NI incorporating ecosystem condition monitoring and NC ecosystem assessment systems which aligns with progress in the rest of the UK.

Preliminary work in NI includes: review of natural capital asset register needs and evidence for natural capital assessments, development of a '*Living Map*' of NI, enhancement of evidence base, including preparations for a new NI Countryside Survey, and case studies on natural capital value.

Actions & Targets

- 
- By 2022: Develop & publish an initial Northern Ireland Natural Capital Asset Register.
 - Enhance & maintain our datasets for determining ecosystem condition of broad NI habitats and associated ecosystem services.
 - Scope & develop a robust NC and ecosystem assessment framework for NI.
 - Consider extension to Cultural Capital, connecting to work by HM Treasury & DCMS.
 - Apply a NC accounting framework across public sector development and action plans and integrate biodiversity values into all decision-making processes at all levels.
 - Enhance our evidence on the extent, condition, functioning and connectivity of NI ecosystems, using a range of earth observation, survey methodologies and land cover assessments.



Future Vision/Outcome

The value of our natural resources is recognised and embedded in all our investment decisions and is an integral part of everyday life and work.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





Strategic Environmental Outcome 4

Sustainable production & consumption on land and at sea

Sustainable production & consumption involves the production and use of products and services in a manner that is environmentally benign, socially beneficial and economically viable over their whole life cycle. Key to this is '*resource efficiency*', commonly defined as using the Earth's limited resources in a sustainable manner while minimising impacts on the environment. This is something that applies across all sectors - including industry, agriculture and energy.

16. Future Agricultural Policy

Current Status

Future Agricultural Framework portfolio under development.

Action & Targets

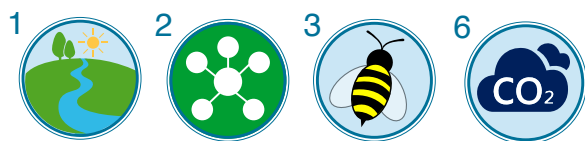


- Public consultation on policy proposals.

Future Vision/Outcome

An industry that: is environmentally sustainable in terms of its impact on, and guardianship of, air and water quality, soil health and biodiversity, while making its fair contribution to achieving net zero carbon targets; pursues increased productivity in international terms as a means of sustained profitability, closing the productivity gap which has been opening up with other major suppliers; displays improved resilience to external shocks which are ever more frequent and to which the industry has become very exposed; and which operates within an integrated, profitable, efficient, sustainable, competitive and responsive supply chain, with clear transmission of market signals and an overriding focus on high quality food and the end consumer.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





17. Energy

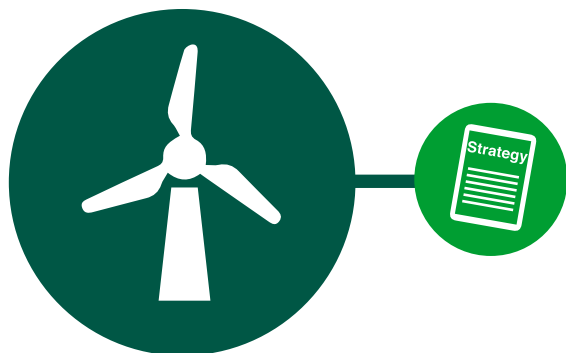
Current Status

Under the 2010 Strategic Energy Framework, the NI Executive set a target that 40% of electricity consumed in NI would come from renewable sources by 2020. For the 12 month period ending 30 June 2021, 45.4% of total electricity consumption in NI was generated from renewable sources located here.

This has led to a significant decrease in greenhouse gas emissions from the energy supply sector which has seen a 45% reduction (-2.4 MtCO₂e) between 1990 and 2018. While laudable, it should be borne in mind that the energy supply sector still accounts for 15% of all GHG emissions in NI.

Subject to Executive approval, a new Energy Strategy will be published before the end of 2021 which outlines the path to achieving net zero carbon energy in a way that is secure, affordable and clean.

Actions & Targets



- By end of 2021: Publish an Action Plan that will identify a range of supporting actions to deliver a forthcoming Energy Strategy.

Future Vision/Outcome

The Energy Strategy will lead to 'net zero carbon and affordable energy'. It will do this by following five principles:

- Placing you at the heart of our energy future;
- Grow the green economy;
- Do more with less;
- Replace fossil fuels with renewable energy; and
- Create a flexible, resilient and integrated energy system.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





18. Productive & Sustainably Used Seas

Current Status

The Northern Ireland marine area is 6,819km² and provides opportunities for Green Growth through a sustainable blue economy.

UK Marine Strategy 2018 Environmental Status assessment of commercial fish and shellfish - Good Environmental Status was not achieved, but there has been an improving situation since 2012.

A draft Marine Plan for NI has been produced and consulted on in 2018.

UK Fisheries Act 2020 establishes the framework for managing all UK fisheries sustainably as an independent coastal state.

Fishing and aquaculture makes an important contribution to the Northern Ireland economy and in particular the economy of coastal communities. In 2018, there were 854 fishers in Northern Ireland and fish landings were 22,417 tonnes, with a value of approximately £27.7 million. Indirectly, commercial fishing supports a variety of other jobs, such as ancillary engineering and service industries. The fish and shellfish processing sector employed 643 full time equivalents in 2018 and had a value of approximately £94m.

In 2018 aquaculture production totalled 4078 Tonnes with a value of approximately £11.6m.

Climate change pressures on the Northern Ireland marine area include: sea level rise, increased storminess, ocean acidification, and rising temperatures.

Actions & Targets

- Integrate post 2020 international marine sustainability targets into DAERA strategies.
- Adopt a 'Marine Plan for Northern Ireland' in 2022.
- Review the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966 and develop fisheries policies aligned with the objectives of the UK Fisheries Act 2020.
- By November 2022: Publish Joint Fisheries Statement.
- Evaluate climate change scenarios and potential impacts on coastal habitats, fisheries & aquaculture.
- Publish a comprehensive baseline of marine Natural Capital.





- Invest to support the transition to a low carbon economy, and the protection and enhancement of blue carbon habitats and the wider marine environment.
- Working to achieve the fisheries objectives in the UK Fisheries Act 2020 through development of Joint Fisheries Statement and Fisheries Management Plans.
- Provide advice on implementation for Marine Plan delivery.
- Implement UK Marine Strategy Programme of Measures.

Future Vision/Outcome

Future vision:

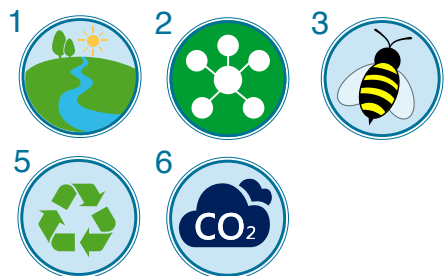
Our vision is a healthy NI marine area which is managed sustainably for the economic, environmental and social prosperity of present and future generations.

We aim to achieve this by managing and protecting the marine environment, preventing its deterioration and restoring it where practical, while allowing sustainable use of marine resources, and ensuring it is resilient and adaptable to climate change.

Outcome:

Achievement of Good Environmental Status of our seas and a thriving blue economy.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





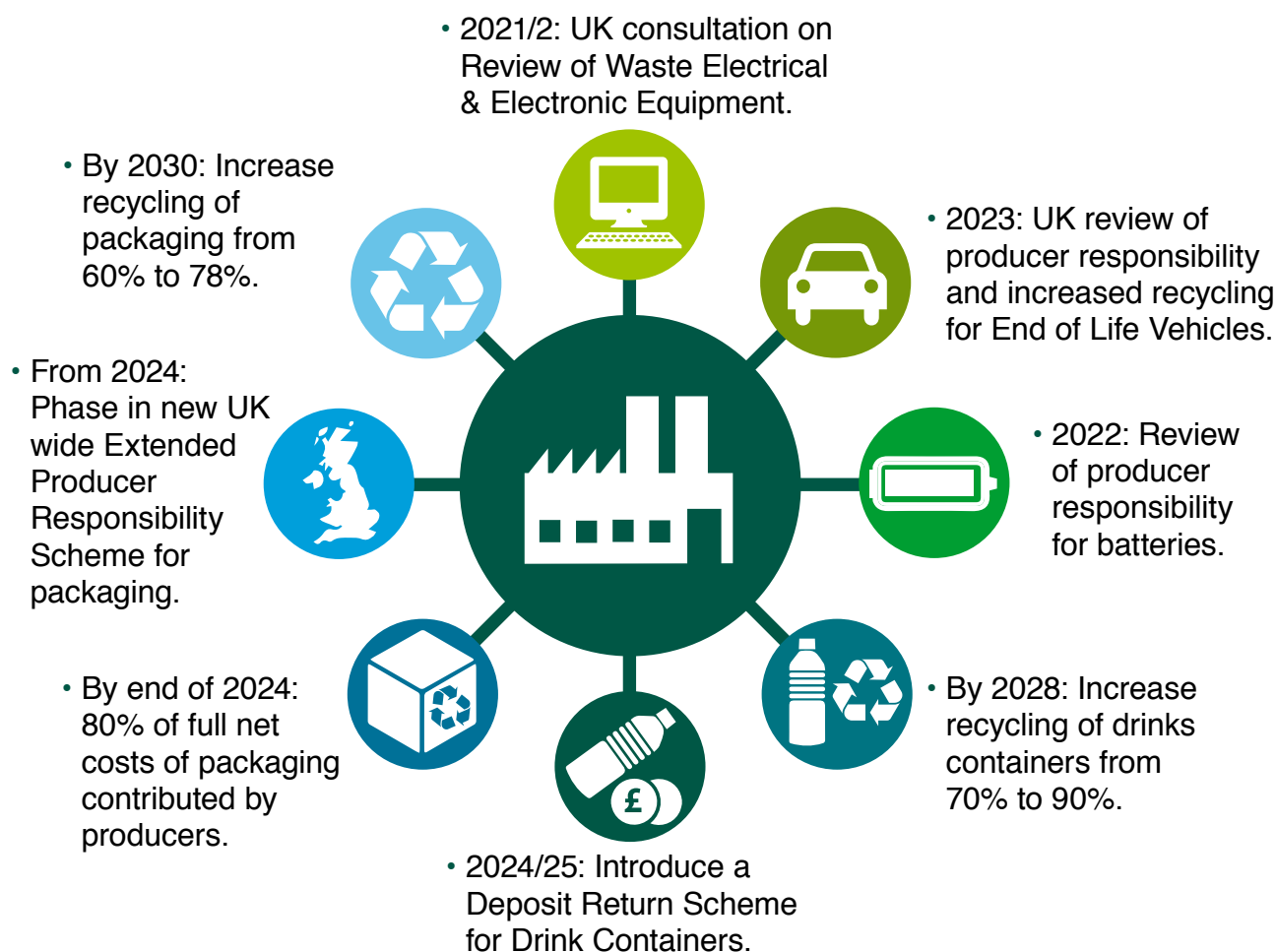
19. Producer Responsibility

Current Status

Producer responsibility schemes currently in place cover packaging, batteries, Waste Electrical & Electronic Equipment and End of Life Vehicles.

Producers cover an estimated 10% of costs in the current packaging waste scheme.

Actions & Targets



Future Vision/Outcome

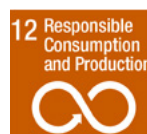
Increase in the recycling of goods and packaging after use by consumer.

Increase in costs being recovered through producer responsibility schemes.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





20. Reducing Single-Use Plastic (SUP)

Current Status

DAERA is supporting awareness raising action and behaviour change via social media and Eco-Schools to reduce the use of unnecessary single-use plastic.

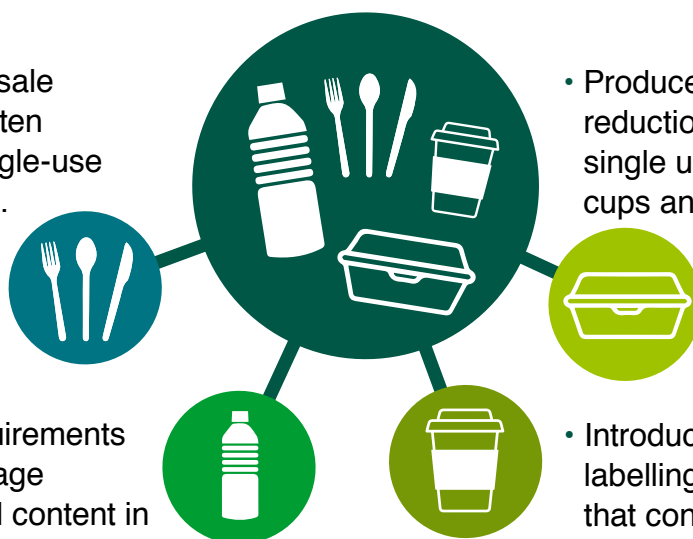
The NI Executive has agreed to reduce unnecessary single-use plastic across the NI Government Estate.

The Marine Litter Report 2019 found 78% of litter on NI beaches was made of plastic. Six of the top ten items were single-use plastic.

The Litter Composition Report 2019/20 found 71% of littered items on our streets contain plastic.

Actions & Targets

- Restrict the sale or supply of ten common single-use plastic items.



- Produce a consumption reduction plan and targets for single use plastic takeaway cups and food containers.

- Set requirements for average recycled content in bottles.

- Introduce clearer labelling of products that contain single-use plastic.

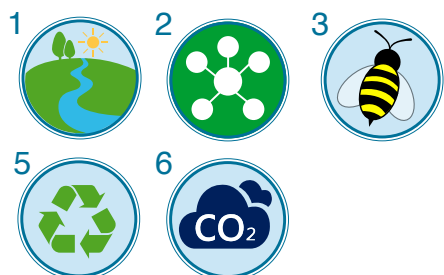
Future Vision/Outcome

Suppliers to look for sustainable alternatives to single-use plastic products.

Consumers to refuse single-use plastic, demand refill options and reuse plastic items. If these options are not feasible then consumers to recycle their plastic.

Reduce the use of single use plastic cups and food containers.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





21. Carrier Bags

Current Status

Since 2013 the NI Carrier Bag Levy has removed in excess of 1.5 billion bags from circulation and has helped substantially in delivering a cleaner and greener country which is a better place to live and do business.

Actions & Targets



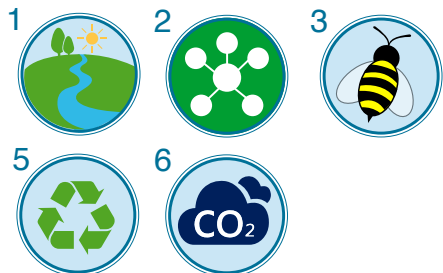
Future Vision/Outcome

The levy and its outcomes are key targets in delivering sustainable waste management across NI.

Behavioural shift: regular reuse of reusable bags.

Reduced litter and pollution.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





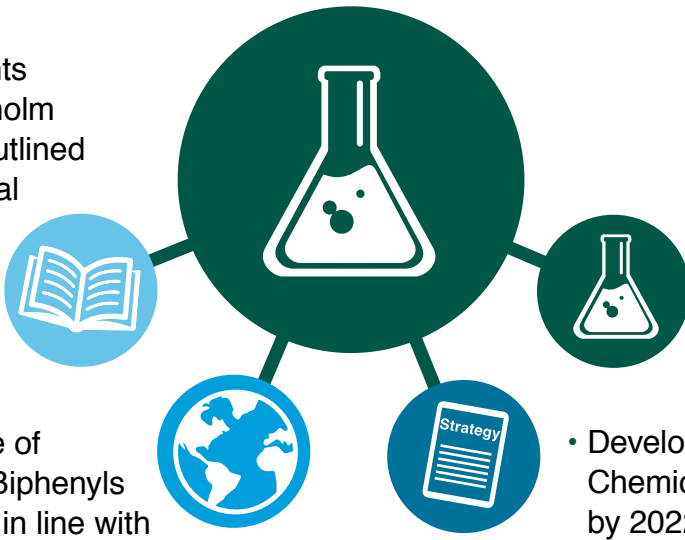
22. Chemicals

Current Status

Defra and the Devolved Administrations are developing a Chemicals Strategy to ensure the safe use and management of chemicals across their lifecycle.

This will aim to reduce chemical pollution and address legacy substances, delivering commitments as outlined in the UK 25 Year Environment Plan and is hoped to be UK wide in scope.

Actions & Targets

- Fulfil commitments under the Stockholm Convention as outlined in the UK National Implementation Plan.
 - Eliminate the use of Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) by 2025, in line with commitments under the Stockholm Convention.
 - Effective reporting of the large scale use of F-gases and Ozone Depleting Substances, taking advantage of new database.
 - Develop and publish Chemicals Strategy by 2022.
- 

Future Vision/Outcome

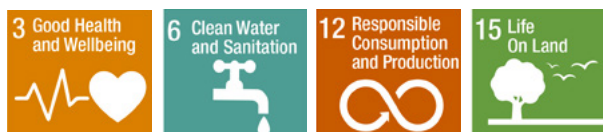
Contribute to wider government ambitions including the move to a circular economy, achieving net zero, reversing biodiversity loss, and supporting the green recovery.

Build on existing strategies and principles set out in the UK Environment Bill - in particular the precautionary and polluter pays principles.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





23. Environmental Regulation: Permitting

Current Status

DAERA's Regulatory Transformation Programme (RTP) will overhaul NI's legislative and operational framework for environmental regulation.

The Environmental Better Regulation Act (NI) 2016 provides enabling powers to reduce the complexity of environmental legislation in respect of environmental permitting and environmental powers of entry.

Actions & Targets

- Digital transformation of application services for waste, water and pollution control authorisations.



- Publication of consultation on policy proposals for a new environmental permitting regime during 2022.

- Digital transformation of site inspection forms for waste, water and pollution control regulatory staff.

- Develop the policy, subordinate legislation and guidance required for a new environmental permitting regime governing waste (selected activities), water (discharge, abstraction & impoundment), radioactive substances and pollution prevention and control, and associated legislation on powers of entry.



Future Vision/Outcome

Integration of environmental protection and economic growth in NI as the regulatory burden for responsible and compliant operators is reduced.

Replacement of the current systems for authorising and regulating a number of environmental activities with a single standardised, more streamlined and less bureaucratic regime.

Higher levels of protection for the environment.

A risk based regulatory system that will help responsible businesses operate effectively within environmental limits.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





24. Antimicrobial & Disinfectant Contamination

Current Status

Development of resistant microorganisms that cause simple infections to become untreatable by current antimicrobials (AM) is one of the biggest and most imminent threats in the world. It is accelerated by inappropriate use of AM in humans but also in animals and plants. The UK has a National Action Plan to fight antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and NI has adopted a five year action plan with the same aim (2019-2024).

Actions & Targets

- Monitor AMR abattoir sampling and passive surveillance.
- Responsible Use of AM training programme to farming families/ employees.
- Development of open access database of animal disease incidence in NI.
- Publish the next five year action plan for tackling AMR beyond 2025.
- Capture NI AM Usage and Sales data.
- Develop whole genome sequencing capacity in our national laboratory.

Future Vision/Outcome

Change the mentality and ethos of farming with regards to AM use. Develop a culture of prevention of disease rather than cure. Reduction of antibiotics, antiparasitics, antifungals and disinfectants can be achieved by preventive medicine, biosecurity, better farm structures with respect to the environment and its biodiversity and strong collaboration between government, educators, professionals and animal owners.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





Strategic Environmental Outcome 5

Zero waste & highly developed circular economy

The Circular Economy is an economic system which reduces overall demand for resources, retains the value of resources and seeks to regenerate our natural ecosystems. By designing things differently, we can reduce overall demand for raw materials, reduce waste generation and create things that retain value throughout their entire life cycle. By keeping technical and natural materials in circulation for longer at their highest value we retain their embodied carbon and can increase nature's ability to sequester carbon.

A circular economy is fuelled by renewable energy and while the decarbonisation of the energy sector is a necessary part of achieving net zero, the circular economy is an equally essential element because by its application we create more sustainable production and consumption patterns which are needed to tackle resource scarcity, inequality and waste generation.

The circulation of natural materials can create new bio-economy enterprises and will help regenerate natural systems. In a Circular Economy system we create places where people have greater access to products, businesses thrive by becoming more resource efficient and we improve the health of natural ecosystems.

25. Circular Economy

Current Status

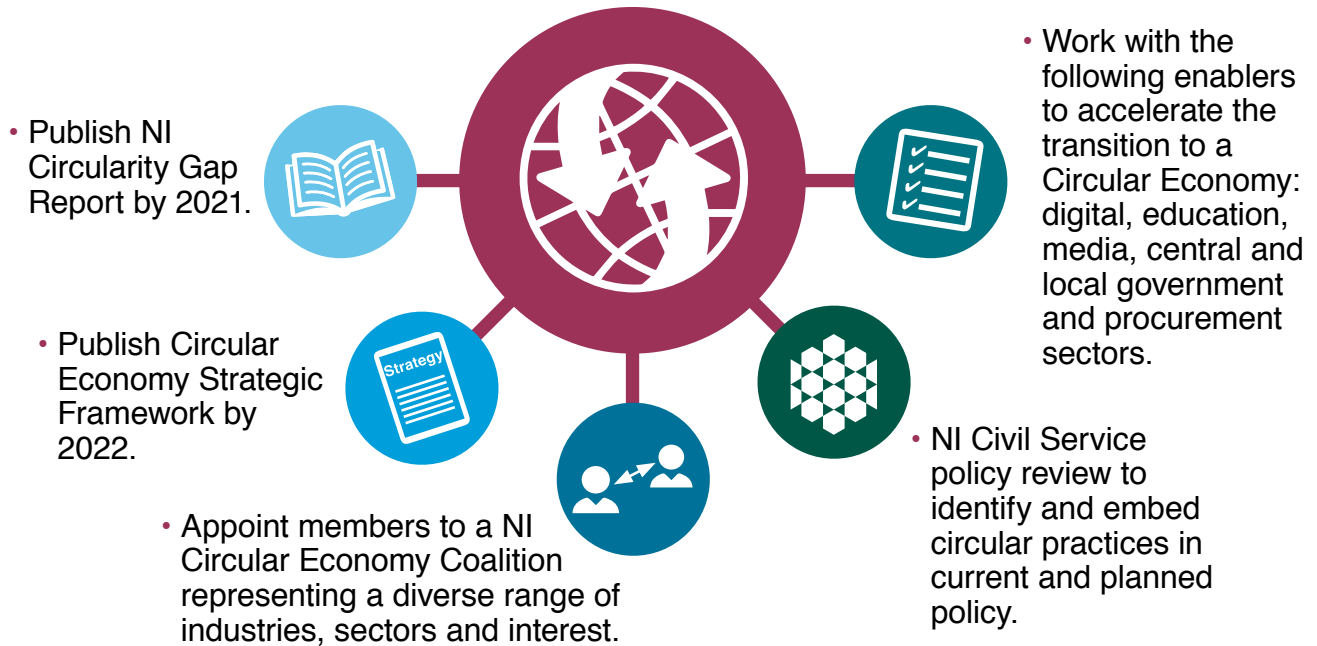
The Department for the Economy (DfE) is currently developing a Circular Economy Strategic Framework (CESF) for NI.

Recognising Circular Economy as a cross-cutting theme for the Executive, this work will be progressed in partnership with officials across all Government Departments.

Focus areas have been identified which present the greatest opportunity to lead the transition. This includes the following four business sectors: Advanced manufacturing, construction and built environment, tourism and the bio-economy; and the following four material flows: Food, textiles, electronics and packaging including plastics, paper, cardboard and glass.



Actions & Targets



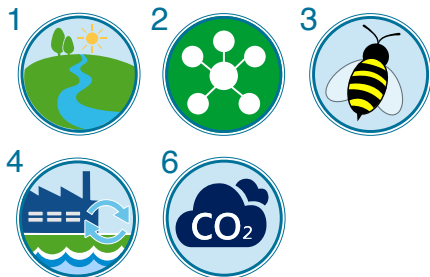
Future Vision/Outcome

The CESF will provide a first step in setting out a clear vision for the Circular Economy in Northern Ireland.

It will inform upcoming environmental, economic and social policy development, raise awareness within the private and public sectors as well as the third sector of what a Circular Economy (CE) is and will identify where opportunities exist to create a more circular NI economy.

It will increase collaboration and create a joined up approach to CE across central government.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





26. Waste Management

Current Status

Waste Management Strategy

Current Waste Management Plan in place from 2019 as a provisional measure until new Waste Management Strategy developed.

Closure report for current Waste Management Strategy being developed.

Under Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme current target for 2022 is to meet a 77% overall recycling rate for packaging.

Prevention & Reuse

Northern Ireland’s Waste Prevention Programme ‘*Stopping Waste in its Tracks*’ was published in 2020.

This programme included new and ongoing actions aimed at improving waste prevention and increasing education and awareness.

Food Waste

The Food Waste Regulations (NI) 2015 provide for separate collection, transport & treatment of food waste.

The Regulations contain a range of measures, most notably requiring district councils to provide for separate collection of food waste for households and placing a duty on food businesses producing in excess of 5kg of food waste/week to present food waste for separate collection.

Since the introduction of the Regulations, over one million tonnes of biodegradable waste have been diverted from landfill, positively impacting the levels and quality of waste recycling.

Actions & Targets

- Publish new Waste Management Strategy by 2023.
- Introduce new UK wide Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme for packaging in 2023.
- Introduce a Deposit Return Scheme for Drink Containers in 2024/25.

- Bring forward all actions set out in the Waste Prevention Plan 2019.
- By 2035, send no more than 10% of waste to landfill.
- Legislation to reduce the consumption of single use plastic items (SUP).



- Work towards setting targets for waste prevention & reuse.
- Increase number of businesses in NI participating in voluntary food waste reduction initiatives.
- Work with delivery partners to develop behaviour change campaigns.
- Continued education & awareness raising initiatives to encourage the removal of as much food waste as possible from residual household waste streams.
- Continue to work with food redistribution charities to use NI's food surplus to help feed some of the most vulnerable members of society.

Future Vision/Outcome

A low carbon, resource efficient society in which resources are valued and reused, putting them back into the economy and waste is prevented.

Increased recycling rates with targets set to support this.

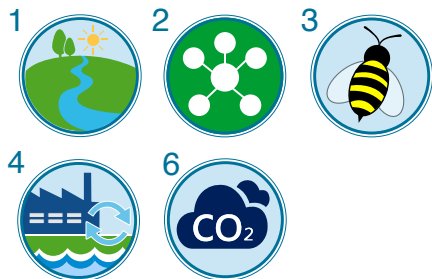
Changed consumer attitudes to reuse & repair and waste prevention.

No biodegradable waste to landfill.

Increased food redistribution.

All in society aware of the problem of food waste and take active steps to reduce this.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





27. Illegal Waste Disposal & Fly-tipping

Current Status

Sections 4 & 5 of the Waste & Contaminated Land Amendment Act (NI) 2011 (2011 Act), once commenced, will provide analogous powers to both DAERA and district councils in addressing illegal waste disposal including fly-tipping (enforcement and clean up).

In preparation for commencement, DAERA has been working in partnership with councils through the Local & Central Government Waste Working Group (GWWG) and the NI Strategic Waste Partnership (NISWP) to agree an operational protocol (the '*Fly-tipping Protocol*') which provides the demarcation of roles and responsibilities of each. The protocol was agreed in principle by the GWWG/NISWP but in recognition that it will be for each individual council to sign up. As of June 2021, seven of the 11 councils have committed to the protocol. The remaining 4 remain in discussion with DAERA.

Commencement has been postponed pending an assessment of the resource requirements expected to be employed by a council in utilising the additional enforcement powers available.

Actions & Targets





Future Vision/Outcome

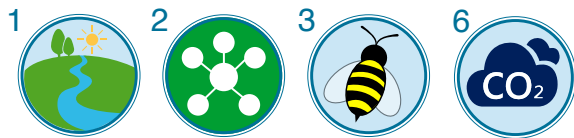
The protocol is adopted and implemented by all 11 district councils and the outstanding sections of the 2011 Act commenced.

DAERA and all 11 councils will have the full range of powers available.

A clear and universally agreed approach to tackling fly-tipping.

A partnership approach that includes the development of systems and processes which will better record the levels of illegal disposal and fly-tipping (including enforcement and clean-up costs).

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





Strategic Environmental Outcome 6

**Fair Contribution to UK net zero greenhouse gas emissions
& improved climate resilience and adaptability**

There is broad acceptance of the desirability of shifting towards a low-carbon economy and ensuring society can respond and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK which does not have bespoke local climate change legislation. The Executive is committed to delivering a Climate Change Act for Northern Ireland and growing a low carbon skills base to enable Northern Ireland to play its part in limiting the rise in global temperatures to 1.5°C.

28. Climate Change

Current Status

Legislation

The UK Climate Change Act 2008 extends to Northern Ireland, and Northern Ireland must contribute to the UK-wide net zero by 2050 target under that Act.

Northern Ireland is currently the only part of the UK which does not have bespoke local climate change legislation which complements the UK Climate Change Act 2008.

The New Decade New Approach agreement included a commitment to bring forward a Climate Change Act for Northern Ireland.

ETS

UK Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) has been implemented to replace EU ETS from January 2021. NI participates in both the UK and EU ETS.

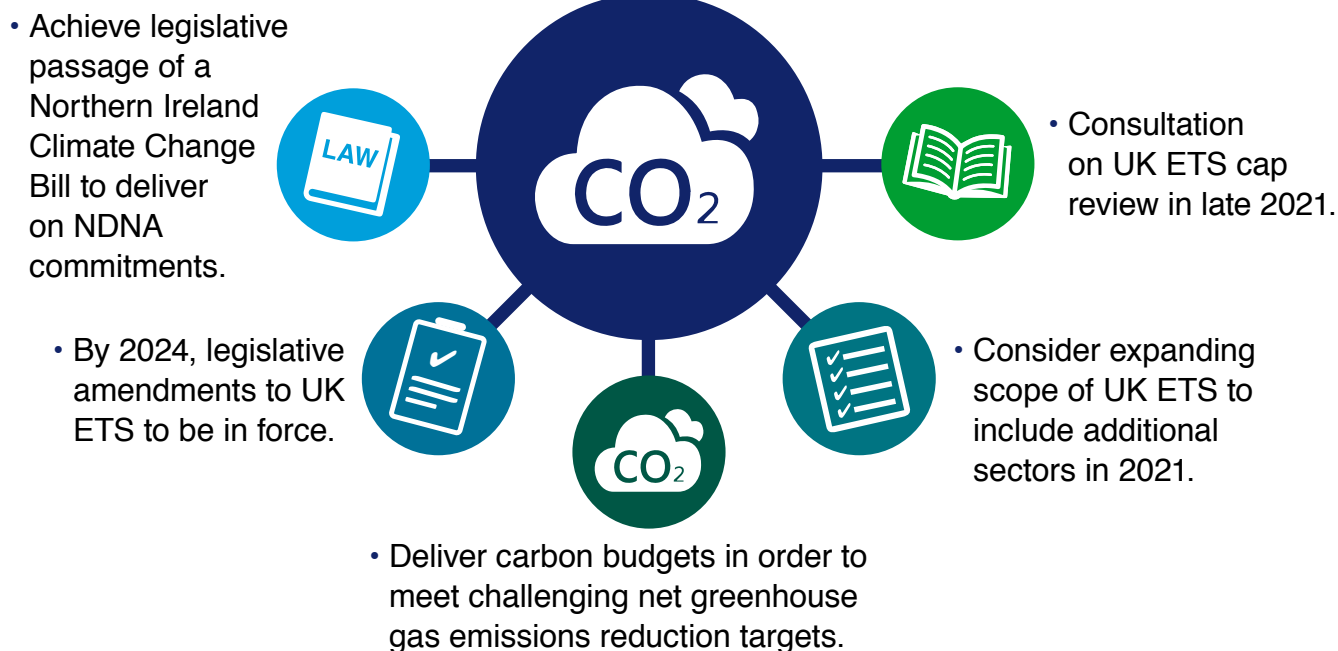
UK ETS operates a '*cap and trade*' system designed to reduce the effects of CO₂ emissions on climate from energy intensive industrial and electricity generating installations.

The scheme sets a cap on the total Greenhouse Gases that can be emitted. Emissions allowances can be traded.

The UK ETS is very similar to the EU ETS, however it has a 5% lower cap in light of the UK's climate ambitions.



Actions & Targets



- The development and delivery of appropriate policies by all Departments in order to achieve challenging net greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets and carbon budgets.
- Review of design of UK ETS to include revision of policy for free allocation of carbon allowances in 2021.
- Analysis of impact of reduced cap scenarios to inform policy development in 2021.

Future Vision/Outcome

Enactment of a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill containing statutory five yearly carbon budgets, interim and long term GHG emissions reduction targets, and duties which complements climate change adaptation requirements under the UK Climate Change Act 2008.

NI's fair contribution to UK-wide net zero target by 2050.

Reduce unnecessary emissions and review cap on number of carbon allowances in UK ETS.

Transition to a net zero carbon and affordable energy system.

Actions also contribute to SEOs



UN Sustainable Development Goals





6. Departmental Activities

Whilst it is incumbent upon all of us to play our part in protecting the environment, the public sector should be seen to lead by example and it is doing so in a variety of ways.

The NI Civil Service (NICS) is committing to government buildings being 100% supplied by renewables. Government is a significant energy user and this move to 100% renewable electricity will help us in the transition to lower emissions. Energy savings and the consequential reduction in carbon across all departments feed into the wider Energy Management Strategy and Action Plan to 2030 that was approved by the NICS board in January 2019 for the central government estate.

As part of the NICS wide New Ways of Working Review, a series of regional hubs will be established across NI to enable civil servants to use office space closer to home. These Connect2 hubs will contribute to a reduction in emissions by cutting down on the number of cars travelling long distances on unnecessary journeys.

The Department of Finance has sustainable construction design recommendations that can facilitate energy/carbon efficiency targets for new build construction and refurbishment projects beyond the requirements of local Building Regulations.

The Department of Communities (DfC) has published its Climate Change Action Plan for 2021/22. This includes commitments around consideration of how to progress the retrofitting of homes to meet commitments on emissions; building further on environmental standards in regeneration interventions; and embedding climate change issues more explicitly in grant conditions and in investment decisions. The Department has identified funding for a Climate Change Fund to assist in reducing its carbon footprint. Elements of this connect to the Department's work across its responsibilities, including a Sports Strategy, and ensuring that the opportunities in Green Growth read across to employability and skills programmes.

Climate Change related challenges may have significant implications for heritage assets over coming years, with the potential to accelerate/exacerbate many decay mechanisms. DfC has the policy lead for the historic environment, working with colleagues across other departments and within local government to identify and address climate change impacts on cultural heritage and shared challenges or opportunities. DfC has engaged with district councils through their Community Planning process to advise them of the potential of the historic environment and provide advice through the Local Development Plan process toward developing plan policies which conserve, protect and enhance the historic environment - including steps to consider the future impacts of climate change. The Protocol for the Care of the Government Historic Estate commits Executive Departments and their Arm's Length Bodies to lead by example in their management of these assets, and includes requirements to embed climate change considerations in doing so.



The Department for Infrastructure has made significant investment in promoting walking, wheeling and cycling and sustainable public transport to reduce the harmful effects of transport emissions. Its Blue/Green Infrastructure Fund is being used to support other Departments and public sector bodies to invest in projects which benefit the environment, including creation of greenways and active travel schemes. DfI has introduced a pilot scheme to trial electric vehicles within the Department's operational fleet and is working to reduce diesel emissions from the Strangford Ferry Service.

All departments are continuing to take steps to minimise waste production and actively encourage recycling across all NICS buildings. The NICS wide Plastic Reduction Plan will reduce unnecessary single use plastics throughout the government estate. DAERA is currently implementing the plan, working with suppliers, officials and CPD to remove unnecessary plastics where possible. An outright ban will come into force in October 2021.

The Department of Justice is seeking to reverse biodiversity loss across its estate by establishing an overarching departmental action plan. Work has already been undertaken on some of its sites to create and enhance wildlife habitats including management of an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI).

Demonstrating its commitment to leading by example, DAERA in partnership with Keep NI Beautiful, is seeking to become the world's first government department to achieve 'Eco-Department' status. This will build on Northern Ireland's previous successes in the well-established Eco-Schools Programme in which Northern Ireland has already scored two world-firsts - the first Green Flag Award (Downpatrick Nursery, 1994 - now the oldest Green Flag in the world) and the first member country to have every school signed up to the scheme (2015).

This ground-breaking undertaking highlights a stakeholder driven, bottom up approach to practical environmental management and a long term pledge to continuous environmental improvement. The Foundation for Environmental Education, the world's largest environmental education organisation, will oversee the rigorous 7-step assessment process, which will ultimately create a balanced environmentally responsible ethos and strong environmental performance within DAERA.

The departmental review process consists of the key programme themes of litter & waste, energy, water conservation & protection and restoration or improvement, transport & travel, biodiversity, green information & communication and can only positively impact and deliver considerable benefits to everyone in Northern Ireland. The prestigious Green Flag award is a global symbol of positive environmental and social action.

The Department of Education published the NI Executive's '*Children & Young People's Strategy 2020-2030*' (CYPS) in January 2021. CYPS aims to support the rights and improve the well-being of all our children and young people, including their environmental well-being. CYPS seeks to build on the interest that children and young people already have in the environment and provide opportunities for them to access and interact with the natural environment at home, in school and in daily activities; and work to improve and enhance the quality of the



environments in which they live, learn and play. It is important that children and young people have an understanding of and respect for the environment; that they have access to the natural environment; and that they live in environments which promote their health and well-being.

The Executive Office is directly encouraging sustainable and environmental approaches to regeneration in its engagement with young people as part of the *'Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) Strategy'*. One of the headline actions of the T:BUC Strategy is engagement through the T:BUC Camps Programme, delivered in partnership with the Department of Education and the Education Authority.

The Urban Villages Initiative aims to foster positive community identities; build community capacity; and improve the physical environment. Projects seek to: improve physical and mental-health; encourage public engagement with the environment (including school and community based elements); and enhance ways central and local government and communities can work better together.



7. Next Steps

Office for Environmental Protection

Subject to the approval of the NI Assembly, it is intended that the OEP will become fully functional in Northern Ireland as soon after the Environment Bill receives Royal Assent as is practicable.

Northern Ireland has already been integrated into the complaints handling function of the Interim Environmental Governance Secretariat (IEGS) since its inception in January 2021 and, as the IEGS transitions into the wider remit of the Interim OEP from July 2021, it is hoped that Northern Ireland's proposed role and influence in the new body will broaden too.

In the meantime, DAERA officials are working very closely with colleagues in Defra and the Chair-designate of the OEP, Dame Glenys Stacey, to ensure that all possible preparatory work will have been completed in good time to ensure the OEP can hit the ground running when it is established as a statutory body.

Northern Ireland's Environmental Improvement Plan

The provisions of the Environment Bill do not require the Environment Strategy to be formally adopted as the EIP although it is anticipated that the DAERA Minister will make a statement for clarity. The Strategy will become NI's first EIP either when the strategy is published or when the relevant provision of the Bill is commenced, whichever is later.

Implementation

Whilst this is a high level strategy setting the Executive's direction of travel for our environment over the coming decades, greater detail on actions, targets and desired future outcomes will be provided during the development and implementation of the various Strategies, Action Plans and Programmes which will sit under the umbrella of the Environment Strategy. The detail around the various Impact Assessments to be completed will therefore be contained within those resultant Strategies, Action Plans and Programmes as it would not be practicable to have them accompany this Strategy.



8. How To Respond

To make this consultation as accessible as possible, we are using NI Direct's Citizen Space as our response route² for collating responses.

You can respond to this consultation at the NIDirect Consultation Hub:

Citizen Space: <https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk>

Just click on the link and follow the questions in order.

Early responses are encouraged but responses should arrive no later than

4pm Tuesday 18 January 2022.

Before you submit your response please read Section 9 below, which gives guidance on the legal position.

If you require any further information, contact Lisa Frazer on 028 9056 9497 or esni@daera-ni.gov.uk

² If you prefer, you can e-mail esni@daera-ni.gov.uk and request a template for completion.



9. Freedom of Information Act 2000: Confidentiality of Consultations

The Department will publish a summary of responses following completion of the consultation process. Your response, and all other responses to the consultation, may be disclosed on request. The Department can refuse to disclose information only in exceptional circumstances.

Before you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of consultations and they will give you guidance on the legal position about any information given by you in response to this consultation.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority (the Department in this case). This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this consultation, including information about your identity, should be made public or treated as confidential.

This means that information provided by you in response to the consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances.

The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that:

- the Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided;
- the Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties 'in confidence' which is not confidential in nature;
- acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner.

For further information about confidentiality of responses, please contact the Information Commissioner's Office³.



Annex A - Public Discussion Exercise

The 2019/20 Public Discussion Document on a proposed Environment Strategy received 2,500 substantive responses from a wide range of stakeholders. A summary report of the exercise was published in November 2020.

The responses received were broadly supportive, for example 90%+ support for the Environment Strategy to be an Executive endorsed strategy. Respondents wanted the environment to be a top priority.

Good governance and extensive collaboration in implementing the strategy were felt to be essential requirements, with key themes being: climate change; recycling & waste; biodiversity; sustainability; education & awareness; health & well-being; agriculture; energy; transport; and protecting the economy.

Respondents indicated the need for outcomes and targets to be specific and realistic, with results which are tangible, measurable (with adequate monitoring & enforcement) and time-bound. The Strategy was seen as a key opportunity to drive up environmental standards.

All enquiries to:

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